



Shera of the Punjab

By IRENE MASON HARPER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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To My Readers

THIS is the story of a boy about your age whose name, Nikku, which means Little One, was changed to Shera, which means Lion. It is also the story of his sister, Shanti, whose name means Peace. They live in the Punjab, the Land of the Five Rivers, in the northern part of India.

All the adventures in this story are true. Of course they did not happen to one boy and one girl, nor even to one group. But all of them have happened to someone I have known since I came to live in India over twenty years ago.

The sad thing that happened to Nikku in the first part of the first chapter you will not be able to understand unless I tell you something about caste in India. The religion of Hinduism teaches that persons must always belong to the caste or class of society in which they were born. They are high-caste or low-caste because they were born so, and they can never change. The outcastes are those who belong to no caste and, therefore, are despised. They are called untouchables because caste people are forbidden by their religious laws to touch them. These outcastes or untouchables are often called the depressed classes.

It is very important for you to know that a great change is coming in India in the treatment of the depressed classes or outcastes. Led by Mr. Gandhi, whom all India honors, an

active campaign against untouchability has spread throughout the country. For many, many years before this, Christian missionaries had been trying to show love and kindness to the outcastes, and had taught Christ's message that all persons, high and low, have equal rights. Now a new day has come, and large numbers of the educated classes also are helping the depressed classes to get their rights. In the Punjab there are many villages where boys like Nikku attend school along with Hindu, Mohammedan and Sikh boys, and where the low-castes are treated fairly. Nevertheless there are still many who observe untouchability, and Christians are glad to join hands with those of other religions in the fight against it.

One more thing I am asking you to remember. It is this. The story is about one part of India, that northern part called the Punjab. In many ways it is different from other sections. Also various kinds and tribes of people live in it—Hindus of many castes, Sikhs, Mohammedans, and others. I have written mainly about Chuhra (the sweeper caste) and Christians. Suppose someone wrote a story about children who lived on Park Avenue, New York City, or in Chinatown, San Francisco, or back in the mountains of Tennessee. Would you think it fair to judge all of your great country by that one story? India is a greater country than I can show in this story. I hope you will go on studying about this wonderful land and come to love and respect her and her people.

IRENE MASON HARPER

Moga, Punjab, India

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PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

Let me introduce you to some of the people in this story and tell you how to say their names. I hope that you will pronounce their names as they are spoken in the Punjab. If you will look at the back of this book, you will see how the names of the other people and of places and things in the story are pronounced.

Nikku (nick-oo), a low-caste boy whose name is changed to Sher Masih (share muh-see), but who is called usually just Shera (share-ah).

Shānti (shahn-tee), his sister.

Buddu (bud-oo), his father.

Rahmat Masih (raa-mut muh-see), a Christian teacher.

Missionary Sahib (sah-hib), a Christian missionary from America. There are two in this story; one a worker among the villagers and the other the principal of the Mission School.

Tom, son of the principal.

Headmaster Sahib, head of the Mission School, a native Indian.

Jalal Din (ju-lahl deen), a young man who had been to the Mission School.

Musa (moo-sah), a leader among the boys at the Mission School.

I. M. H.

CHAPTER ONE

A New Name and a New Chance

KUBUDDI, kubuddi, kubuddi, kubuddi." Nikku, the herdboy, found the game so interesting to watch that he did not notice the buffalo and goats straying off. One of the best players, Sham Singh, had just run out from his side, leaving the protection of his team. As soon as he crossed the line half way between the two teams, he had to begin to say, "Kubuddi, kubuddi, kubuddi, kubuddi, kubuddi," as fast as he could and as many times as he could in one breath. If he drew another breath before he got back to his own team, he would be touched by one of the opponents, and then he would be "dead."

The watching Nikku held his breath too. It was the most exciting kubuddi match he had ever seen.

"There, Parkash is after him!" thought Nikku. "He is almost the fastest runner. I could beat him, though, I am sure, if they'd let me play. I can hold my breath longer and run faster than any of them. Oh! Sham Singh is safe! Well done, Shamu!" Nikku just whispered the last words as he crouched in the dust on the edge of the playground.

It was true that Nikku could have beaten any of the team at kubuddi, for he often practised the game by himself, hold-

ing his breath and running. At ten he was bigger and stronger than many of the boys who went to the primary school in the village of Sudki. Yet he never got a chance to study or play with them. For Nikku was an outcaste, one of the despised sweepers to whom fall the tasks of cleaning up dirt and filth. He had work to do all day, herding the animals of his master, Sham Singh's father, while the high-caste boys went to school. When the boys came running out of school in the afternoon, carrying their neat bundles of books on their heads, Nikku usually managed to be cutting grass or grazing the cattle somewhere near the playground just outside the village. He would keep far away till they had put their books on the ground. When they got so absorbed in their game that they would not notice him, he would push forward to see all he could.

Sham Singh's team had lost several players before his turn to run came round again. Still, he had a good chance to win. "Kubuddi, kubuddi, kubuddi." Faster and faster he was saying it, lower and lower, almost under his breath, as he danced back and forth, twisting out of the grasp of the enemy. Suddenly he was caught, but not for long. With a mighty struggle he pulled away. How could he hold his breath so long! He was almost out of reach of the other side when Arjan Das suddenly stretched out his long arm and touched him. Just at that very minute Sham Singh's breath gave out. He could not even whisper, "Kubuddi." He was "dead." All was over! The match was lost!

A NEW NAME AND A NEW CHANCE



As the boys of the winning team turned to get their books, they saw Nikku, the sweeper boy, right in among them. In his excitement he had forgotten how close he was. He tried to slip away, but before he could do so the dreadful thing had happened. Sham Singh did not see him in time. His head was bent down with shame and disappointment. Without looking, he hit his shoulder right against Nikku's chest. He jumped as if a snake had bitten him. "What are you doing here?" he yelled. "Get out of my sight, you filthy sweeper!"

Nikku began to run like a frightened dog with his tail between his legs. Already the other boys were picking up clods of earth to throw at him and shouting: "Dirty dog!" "Untouchable, untouchable!" "Son of a pig, don't you dare come near us again!"

Sham Singh was now almost in tears. "You have touched me! I am defiled! *Hai! Hai!*"

Nikku was trembling with fear when he got out of reach. He began to hunt for the goats and the buffalo. The round red sun had moved below the edge of the big overturned bowl that was the sky, and darkness was coming swiftly. Nikku thought frantically, "Sham Singh will tell his father that I defiled him. Then my master will punish me. Oh, why didn't I remember to keep away from the boys! *Hail! Hail!* I want to die!"

It was nearly dark and quite cold when Nikku finally found all the animals. As he drove them to his master's courtyard in the village he shivered from chill and from fear. He believed that in every shadow there was a huge, black-winged spirit ready to swoop down upon him, and in every tree a god who might be angry with him. His mother and grandmother had told him often enough about the dangers of the dark. His mother would scold him, too, for not remembering her warnings against going close to high-caste people.

Finally the buffalo was safely bedded in her stable and the goats properly turned into the courtyard. Nikku had done

his work very quickly. His master had not got home from the fields. But, from the house, the boy could hear the cries of horror with which his mistress received the tale of Sham Singh's mishap.

"*Hail! Hail!* What trouble you have put me to! Now we shall have to sprinkle Ganges water on you. I must again wash your clothes. Just three days ago they were washed—your long shirt and your best full white trousers that fit so nicely around the ankles, and even your long buttoned coat of the finest cotton cloth. And all this trouble is due to that untouchable dog."

After that, Nikku hardly dared to go to the house door for the leftover bread the mistress usually gave him as wages, though he knew his mother and sisters would not have enough to eat tonight without it.

Through the village lanes Nikku ran toward home with the food, still frightened.

Outside the mud wall, on the opposite side of the village from the school, was the place that frightened him most of all—an open space where the huge black-winged spirits were thought to be waiting to swoop down to carry off small boys. Near the edge was the dreaded shrine of Baleshah, the god of the Low People. It was only a platform of mud-brick with a four-sided pillar in the middle. High up were little niches for lights and offerings. The boy was afraid to go around behind the shrine, for he noticed that no plate of food had been placed on the shelf that night. He thought Baleshah

might be angry at the neglect and do him some harm. He ran through a darkly gleaming, slimy patch of mud and water over which a great cloud of mosquitoes was hovering. As he splashed through, the dirty water splattered over his long shirt, and the mosquitoes had to be beaten off with his hands.

At last the comforting glow of the cooking fire in his father's little mud hut welcomed him. He could see his grandmother nodding in a corner and the younger children close by her. His mother was sitting on a low stool in front of the small hearth which was made of three bricks set in the ground. On a big shallow earthenware dish was the light brown wheat dough all ready to be baked for supper. Mother took a little ball of it, flattened it with her fingers, then tossed it back and forth between her hands till it was as thin as paper and a perfect round.

Nikku entered and lay on the floor, sniffing expectantly the nutty smell of the flat cakes as they baked on the iron plate laid above the fire. The room was full of smoke, but Nikku did not mind at all—he was used to the smarting of his eyes.

The low, smooth, freshly mud-plastered walls, the small, warm room—this was safety, this was home. Here, with his mother, he was no longer afraid. He forgot his worry, too, for a little while.

Shanti, who was one year younger than he, came in, smiling. In one hand she had a little broom of twigs, and in the other a bundle made of a square of clean cloth.

"Guess what it is, Mother," she said merrily. "I swept the

courtyard of the school. The teacher was pleased and gave me rice. He called me a bright girl and said I ought to go to a girls' school and learn to read."

"School!" It was a bitter cry from Nikku. "Who will allow us dogs to touch even the threshold of a school?" he finished, muttering.

"Hush, my son," chided the mother. "Unluckily we are born outcaste. School is for the high-caste people. Their life is worth living. Throughout our life we have to serve them and clean away their filth. It is well for us to keep humble. The Big People, protectors of the poor, are good to us and give us a house. They give us food and sometimes even draw water for us from the village well. That is really more than our right to expect.

"I have heard, it is true," she went on, wistfully, "that in some villages bright boys and girls of the sweeper caste sit in the government schools with the sons of the farmers and other high-caste children. But your father thinks best not to ask this boon for his children lest our masters think we are rebellious and take away our house and refuse us the work in the fields and the village. Quiet the baby, son, while I finish cooking your father's bread."

Nikku picked up his baby sister, and his little brother snuggled close to him. The old grandmother, who usually took care of them while Nikku and Shanti were at their work, had fallen asleep in the corner. Shanti was squatting by her mother, making her pretty hands fly as she patted the cakes

SHERA OF THE PUNJAB

to make them round. When her father came and sat down wearily in the doorway, she brought him a pile of baked bread-cakes and a bowl of boiled lentils all savory with red peppers and garlic. He ate in silence and the children



watched quietly. When he had finished the rest of the family had their supper.

The boy, at least, guessed why his big, strong father, who was usually so ready to talk, was so quiet tonight. "He must be thinking of the message the visitor has been telling us about," Nikku thought to himself. For about two weeks, his father, Buddu, and nearly all the other fathers and uncles of the outcaste section of the village had been talking and arguing far into the night with the visiting preacher, Rahmat Masih, whose name means Mercy of Christ. Nikku liked

hearing the wonderful tales about Jesus Christ, how he helped people and taught them about the loving God. Rahmat Masih was trying to persuade the outcastes to become followers of Jesus and leave the worship of Baleshah. Nikku knew that whatever his father, Buddu, decided, the others would do, for he was the leader of them all. Tonight Rahmat Masih was coming to talk to them once more.

Shanti cleaned the brass saucepan and the plate and cup and bowl, rubbing them with ashes till they shone. She was careful not to use too much water, as it had to be carried from a muddy pond a long way off. Then she put the two babies to sleep in one of the rope-strung beds and crawled in herself under the thin, ragged quilt that covered them.

Nikku dragged the other bed near to the door for the preacher to sit on, and crouched in the corner with his mother, ready to listen to the talk. As he waited, the misery and worry of the day filled his heart again.

"It isn't fair," he muttered. "Mother says the Big People are kind to us, but they really aren't. If a dirty stray dog touches their food, they don't mind. But if a clean outcaste boy comes even near it, they will throw that food away. We must not put our hands on anything the Big People use for cooking or drinking. We must not touch even the rope or the bucket with which they draw water from the common well. Oh, why is it my fate to be Nikku—Little One—Nothing at All!"

Nikku's thought was suddenly interrupted as a tall, fine-

looking young man stepped out of the shadows into the light of the fire, saying, in greeting, "*Salaam, Buddu*" It was Rahmat Masih, the visiting preacher. He was dressed in a clean white shirt of cotton homespun called *khaddar* and full trousers, with a beautiful blue turban wound around his head. He asked Buddu to call any of the men who wanted to hear God's good news



Nikku, folding his hands together and bowing down nearly to his feet, *salaamed* to him respectfully. Then, as Nikku was shrinking back into his corner, Rahmat Masih pulled him up and, putting his arm around him, asked kindly, "What do you need most, son? How can I help you?"

Nikku took a big breath and blurted out all his longing. "O sir, I want to read in the school and play kubuddi and have a new name!"

"Why not?" asked Rahmat Masih, half to himself. "Jesus came to give new life. If Buddu and the others will only de-

cide to walk in his ways, they will learn to be brave and send their children to school even against opposition."

After that, of course, Nikku listened to Rahmat Masih's talk till the very end. He had heard most of it before, but it seemed to have a new meaning tonight. One thing that Rahmat Masih said Nikku decided he wanted to remember always. "The priests and the *pundits*, the learned teachers, scolded Jesus," said the young preacher, "because he ate with outcastes and untouchables. But Jesus taught that all are equal before God. Remember, friends, you are not untouchable, for Jesus Christ has touched you. He is calling you to be his followers and friends."

"Oh, I hope Father decides to become a Christian, and— and perhaps my name can be changed," thought Nikku. He lay awake in the dark, thinking of the name he so hated.

It wasn't really a name at all. He wished he could have a real, honorable name like Arjan Das or Barkat. He knew that his mother had called him Nikku to protect him. He was her first baby, and she and his father were so happy to have a little boy. She believed that bad spirits sought to harm any child who was strong and beautiful and precious to his mother. To fool the spirits into thinking that she did not care much for the baby, his mother called him Little One. When he grew to be a fine, strong boy, she was still afraid for him and did not change his name. She hung a little silver box with a magic verse inside of it around his neck to keep harm away from him. She put black medicine in his big bright eyes

and marked a black cross on his forehead, hoping to protect him from the Evil Eye. She was especially careful about the offerings to Baleshah, and Nikku often had to take the plate of rice and sweets which his grandmother had prepared and place it on the shrine.

Nikku had once asked his father if he might have another name. But Buddu said that it was a very good name for a son of Low People. If he called his son by a fine, high-sounding name, the landowner might think he was getting bold. "We ought to spend our short time on this earth being humble and contented with our lot, according to our fate," he advised.

As Nikku dropped off to sleep his heart was filled with the hope that a change was soon coming. As it happened, he did not have long to wait. The very next day, when Nikku came home from his work for Sham Singh's father, Rahmat Masih told him that Buddu and all his relatives had decided to become Christians.

Then Nikku dared to ask the preacher again about the new name.

"Surely," said Rahmat Masih, smiling, "if you become a new boy, you may have a new name."

That was a surprise! Rahmat Masih explained that becoming a Christian meant living a new life. It wasn't enough that his father and mother and grandmother had decided to be Christians. He and Shanti must be changed and learn to be like Jesus.

Being brave was the hardest for Nikku. He was always

afraid. On that very day his master had punished him for his carelessness in touching Sham Singh, and Nikku had not been brave. When his master beat him with his slipper—and he did not beat very hard, either, for he was a kind man—Nikku had cried and Sham Singh had called him a coward. Jesus, it seemed, was very brave and strong. He was not afraid even in a terrible storm. He was not afraid of the priests and the high-caste people.

There were other people, too, that Rahmat Masih told about in his exciting stories: Abraham leaving his home village, not knowing where he was going, because he wanted to worship the true God; David fighting a giant; and many others, all sure that God loved them and would take care of them. Rahmat Masih told, too, of brave Indian men and women like Sadhu Sunder Singh who forgave and helped those who stoned him. Nikku wondered if he could ever be like these heroes.

After many weeks of teaching Buddu, his friends, and their families in Christian ways, Rahmat Masih thought they were ready to be received into the church. He sent a request to the missionary sahib who visited the villages to come and examine the people and baptize them.

Nikku and Shanti could hardly wait for the exciting time. They had been asking about it for days. "When shall we be made Christians?" "What does 'baptize' mean?" "Will the missionary sahib come to our village?" "May I go to a school?" "Shall I not be called untouchable any more?"

"Shall I get a new name?" Nikku asked over and over.

"Hush, my light," whispered his mother. "Your tongue keeps on moving like scissors. Your father has decided that



we are to become Christians. It is his right to decide. Why do you want another name?"

"I want to be big and brave. I want a Christian name," muttered Nikku, a little ashamed. "I do not want to be Nikku any more."

Buddu spoke gently, his strong face lighting up and his mouth smiling. "I will ask the sahib about your name, my son. If you are worthy of it, I dare say you will be given a new one. But Shanti must keep her own name, for the preacher says it has a Christian meaning, Peace. We shall all learn together to follow the Christian ways."

The expected time at last arrived and with it came the kindly missionary. Under his direction a place was made ready for the meeting. It was to be held in the open space that Nikku used to be so afraid of crossing at night. He had

learned now that there was no winged spirit there. The missionary pointed out that it was the slimy mudhole that was dangerous. The mosquitoes that lived in it brought the malarial fever which made the people sick so often.

Nikku and his cousins helped the missionary fill the mudhole with earth and clean up the place around it. They swept out the rubbish from the lanes and courtyards and put all the manure into a pit they dug. The women cleaned their houses and the girls plastered the walls with fresh, clean clay. Shanti found some red clay and with it painted a very pretty design on both sides of their door. It began to look like a Christian village.

When all was ready the people seated themselves in orderly rows on the ground. The families were called forward by name to be baptized.

Soon it was the turn of Buddu's family to be baptized. The missionary explained that in this ceremony the fathers and mothers were not only promising to be Christ's followers themselves, but also agreeing to teach their children to act in Christian ways. Shanti and Nikku felt very glad to belong to a Christian family.

When Nikku's turn came, the missionary said to all the congregation, "This boy has asked to have a new name. He is now Sher Masih, Lion of Christ, or Shera, as we shall call him. We hope that he will live up to his new name and earn his right to it by being a brave Christian."

CHAPTER TWO

Finding a New Home

SHERA and Shanti thought that moving from the village of Sudki was great fun, but their mother and the other women were weeping. Silently the tears were rolling down their cheeks as they baked big piles of bread-cakes for the journey. Shanti was helping by tying up the large saucepan and the plate and bowl and cup in a square of strong cotton cloth. She made a big knot and thrust the fire tongs through it. Shera was helping his father take out the endpieces of the two rope beds so that they could roll them up to put on the oxcart. After that, they would roll up their two quilts and the thin cotton rugs they used for mattresses and be off on the long uncertain journey.

The goat was to be Shera's special care. His kind master had given the little animal to him, and he had named her Sundri, which means Beautiful. Every day on the journey he would milk her. Now Grandmother and the two babies could have a little milk to drink, and when they got settled, Sundri would give more.

Shera kept thinking about Sundri. "When we find a village where we can live and work without their minding that we are Christians," he said to Buta, one of the boys, whose

family was leaving, too, "I shall sell some of the milk to earn some copper *paise*, and I shall save the coins till I have enough money to pay school fees."

At last the seven Christian families who were leaving the village were ready to start. The creaking oxcart was piled with their belongings. Some of the children kept running back into the empty houses and had to be called again and again by their mothers. A shrill clamor of farewell arose. The old women wailed at the top of their voices. Shera's grandmother made Buddu listen to her.

"Son, son, I told you nought but bad luck would come of your listening to the talk of the new religion. *Hail! Hail!* Woe is me! We are ruined! The headman has turned us out of our houses. We have no shelter, nowhere to go."

"Make patience, weep not, honored Mother," comforted Buddu. "God is leading us. The missionary sahib says that it is well to go, since Christians are not wanted in this village. We shall find a better place to work, I am sure."

The company moved slowly away from the little group of desolate huts. One of the young men turned and shook his fist in the direction of the village of Sudki, shouting in anger. He used very bad words and curses. He hoped the farmers' crops would rot in their fields and bad luck would be theirs!

"Rein your tongue!" commanded Buddu. "It is not worthy of a Christian. Has not the preacher taught you to forgive your enemies as Jesus Christ did?"

"Most of the farmers have been good to us and given us

some grain to carry away," said Mangal, father of Buta. "They really did not want to send us off. They had to obey the old headman. He was displeased because we left our old religion. The rest of the farmers cannot go against the will of the headman of the village."

"I hate them just the same," said Shera to Buta. "Arjan Das yelled at me yesterday when the boys were let out of school. He said, 'Don't you think you're smart, sweeper?' He has no right to call me sweeper, now that we are Christians. I hate him! I hate him! I'd just like to take an axe and cut off his head!"

Buddu overheard. "My son," he said, "you should not speak so. It is not brave, I'm sure, to grow angry and want to kill."

This was somewhat puzzling. Shera thought being brave meant growing strong and not being afraid and overcoming enemies. Here was his father telling him this was wrong. It wasn't going to be easy to learn the way of Christ.

The sun was hot on the road, but there was plenty of shade under the arching graceful *shisham* trees on either side. They stopped for a long time in the middle of the day, to eat their bread and graze the animals. In the afternoon they stopped again. The women rested while some of the men went across the fields to a village to ask the landowners if they wanted laborers. The children waited in a beautiful grove of mango trees where a peacock was strutting up and down, spreading his gorgeous tail. How bright the colors shone in the patches

of sunlight that came through the branches of the great trees! Shanti wished they could live in the village near this lovely grove.

Here the farmers were Mohammedans. They did not think much of the Christian religion. They began arguing bitterly with the callers, and Buddu decided it was better not to stay there.

It grew very chilly when the sun set, for it was February, not yet the end of the cold season. In the village of Sudki, Shanti and Shera had not minded the cold so much, although they had no warm clothes at all and were often shivering. They could always run home at night to the cooking fire and get into bed under the quilts. Here, out by the roadside, they shivered as they gathered twigs to make a little fire. They rolled up in the quilts on the ground and tried to sleep. The screeching of the jackals kept them awake. Once or twice they saw one lift his head above the field of mustard very near them, and his bright eyes glittered in the light of their campfire.

The men kept talking. Some were very hopeful. "I have heard of a number of villages," said one, "where the high-caste people are quite kind. In many places in the Punjab, outcastes are given separate wells. In some places they are allowed to enter the Hindu temples. The Mohammedan and Sikh farmers, too, do not always obey the custom of untouchability."

"My wife's brother lives in Bala village," said Jindu.

"Their boys are allowed to sit in the village school, and one of the farmers gives them water from his own well."

Sardar, one of the young men who had been away from home working in a city, said, "It is well known that all over India the low-caste people are rising up and demanding their rights. They are even getting seats in the legislature, and some have good jobs with the government and get high salaries."

The traveling and the talk went on, hour after hour. Shera got rather tired, tramping by day and listening by night. He enjoyed taking care of his goat, Sundri, and liked those times when they all sang together the psalms they had learned. The tunes were cheerful and pleasing. They forgot their troubles listening to the music.

On the fifth day they stopped in a place different from the dusty roadsides they had found in their thirty miles of wandering. Here the road crossed a canal, broad and calmly flowing between banks of tall, silvery reeds. The fields in this region were full of growing crops, green wheat with heads just beginning to form, mustard putting out its feathery yellow blossoms, and gram ripening fast. "The farmers here must have plenty of work," thought Buddu.

"Where are the children?" asked Grandmother when she waked from her noonday rest that day.

"They have gone to play in the water," said Buddu. He added, "This is a pretty place. I have never before seen such a large canal."

In and out of the reeds at the water's edge ran Shera and Buta. It was a grand place for hide-and-seek. Shanti and the other little girls were softly following the little brown partridges that fluttered here and there in the reeds. They were like tiny hens, and Shanti thought she would like to catch one and keep it in a cage for a pet. She could see the soft feathers and bright eyes of one bird, so near was it. But always, as she put out her hand, it would run very quickly and vanish in the reeds beyond her reach. Tiring of their play, the boys and girls sat on the bank and happily paddled their feet in the water. They had never seen so much water in their lives.

"*Salaam*, boys," said a young man in a friendly voice. "From what village have you come?"

By his dress and his happy face they saw at once that the questioner was a Christian. He told them he lived in the big village half a mile down the canal. It was called Umedpur, the Village of Hope. There was a large Christian brotherhood in that village—more than twenty families. His father was *lambardar*, or elder, of the Christians. The young man's name was Jalal Din, which means Glory of Religion. Recently he had finished school and come back to help his father with the farm work. His father and some of the other Christians owned a little land.

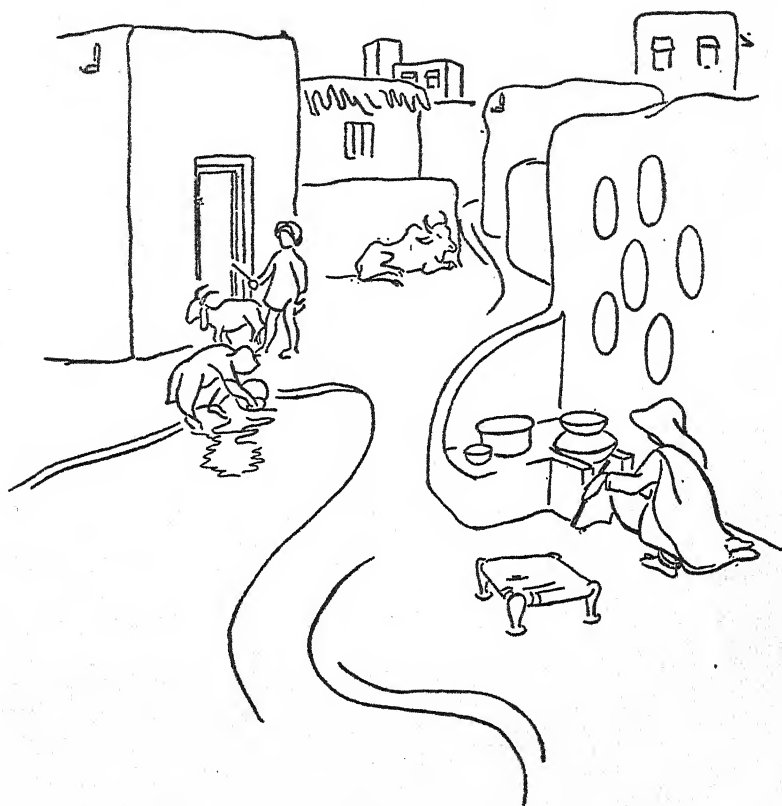
Soon Shera was taking Jalal Din to where Buddu and the other men were sitting on the canal bank. After a little conversation, they started off toward the village with Jalal Din.

Shera was glad. He prayed quietly that they might go to live in the Village of Hope.

That very night they found a home. There were one or two half-ruined huts in the sweeper section of the village of Umedpur, and the owner was glad to let them repair them and live in them. He needed help with the gram harvest and plowing and sowing the spring crops. Another farmer allowed them a piece of land on which to build houses. Of course they needed wood for doors and windows, and Buddu and several others borrowed money from the moneylender with which to buy it. In the end nearly all of them found some work in the village.

Building their houses meant lots of work for the women and children as well as for the men. They dug a sort of pit, and into it they dumped baskets of clay-like earth which they had dug from the edge of the village pond and carried in baskets on their heads. They poured water into the pit. Shera and Buta had a jolly time stamping in it to mix up the clay and make it just right for brickmaking. The cool mud felt good oozing between their bare toes. They never got tired of this part of the work. They liked to scoop up big handfuls of the wet clay, slap it into the wooden forms, and turn the bricks out in neat rows on the level earth to dry. For ten days the bricks had to bake in the sun before they could be used to build the walls of the little square houses.

Shera's best friend in Umedpur was Jalal Din. It seemed to him that his friend knew everything. When Jalal had time



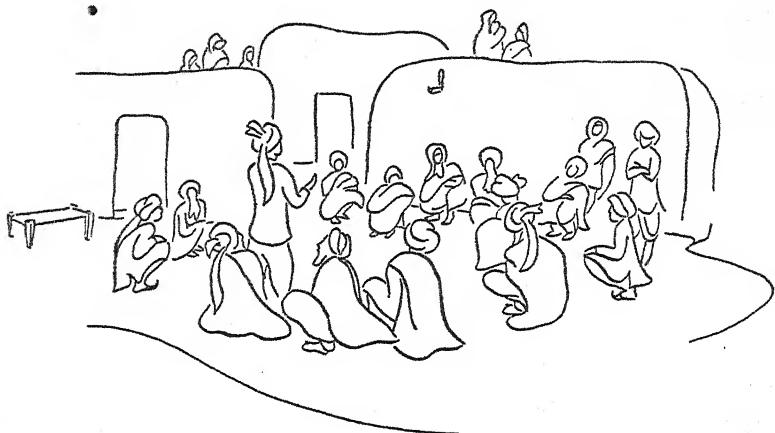
THEY FOUND A HOME IN UMEDPUR, THE VILLAGE OF HOPE



he was always ready to answer Shera's questions. He knew lots of things about birds and animals and plants and how to get better crops. He even knew how to cure sick people, and could tell what caused the fevers in the village. Once a little boy had a bad sore on his foot and his whole leg swelled up and pained terribly. Jalal washed it carefully and applied cloths wrung out of hot water. Then he bound it neatly with a clean cotton rag. He dressed it faithfully every day, and it soon got well. Another time a man was gored by a bull. Jalal knew how to stop the bleeding, and he persuaded the man to go in a cart to the mission hospital twelve miles away. Jalal went with him, and the doctor at the hospital said he had done just right and had saved the man's life.

All these things Jalal had learned at a school called the Village of Service, at Moga, where he had studied for eight years. His father was always praising this school.

"I used to think it was a work of foolishness for one who toils on the land to allow his sons to read. The fathers of schoolboys work till their backs break in order to pay their fees and their boys become useless. They think any work with their hands is beneath their dignity. When they finish school and get their government certificates, they sit around at home and wait for jobs. All they learn in school is to wear fine clothes and be 'gentlemen.' The missionary sahib kept urging me to let my son go to Moga School. He said it was different, and that is true. Just look at my boy here! He turns his hand to any kind of work, no matter how dirty and



hard it is. He is a wonderful help to me in the fields. He is not ashamed of our village, and he tries to help the people improve their ways of living. We have made great progress since he came."

When the new Christian families had been working in Umedpur about two months, a message was received from the missionary sahib of that district. The letter came to Jalal's father. Jalal read it to him and then called together all the men of the Christian brotherhood and told them.

"Our missionary sahib is coming to camp at this village for a week," he announced. "He is bringing the memsahiba and their children to stay among us. My father, the *lambardar*, calls upon you all to help prepare a place for the sahib's tents and to set them up when he comes."

That was a wonderful week for Shanti as well as for Shera.

When the ox carts with their loads of tents and boxes and baskets rumbled up, Shera helped unload. All the children watched while the heavy poles were hoisted and three or four tents arose like a new village of little white houses. After that there were many exciting things to see. There was the sahib's Ford car loaded down with bundles. It was shabby and worn out from the strain of pulling through the deep ruts and holes of the village roads, but it was a fine sight to the boys, nevertheless. Then there were the kind memsahiba and the baby, and the two boys who ran about, peeking into the village and throwing stones into the pond. Shera soon got acquainted with them and they chatted in his language like old friends.

Most marvelous of all, Shanti thought, was the baby. She had heard about her from Sukhi, Jalal's sister. One of the old women had told her that the reason why the sahib's baby was so white was that her mother boiled her in hot water every morning!

Shanti soon had a chance to find out all about the baby. The memsahiba called her into the tent and let her see how she bathed the baby. When the baby was dressed, Shanti was allowed to wheel her in her little cart.

Meanwhile Shera was sitting on the ground in the big tent while the sahib gave him his first reading lesson.

That night, after Shera and Shanti had gone to bed, they heard the missionary talking to their father.

"Buddu, you should send your son and daughter to Chris-

tian schools to learn to read. In the teaching of Christ, every boy and girl has a right to the happiest, fullest life. Jalal can take the boy to the Village of Service and the girl to the girls' school next week. You will need to give them each a suit of clothes and a rug, a quilt and a blanket, and then you must send as much money as you can each month in payment for their food. The mission schools cannot take free pupils. But the boy can earn part of his expenses himself."

"This is a hard saying," argued Buddu, "I need Shera to help me with the work, especially now at harvest-time. He can earn two annas a day. We can do much with that four cents. How can I do without that and pay four annas a month to the school, besides buying clothing and bedding? Shanti is a great help to her mother. No, we cannot spare them. They are our eldest and we are poor people."

"Yet I must tell you again, brother, that the first duty of a follower of Christ is to give his children opportunity to learn the things of God. How can you become a truly Christian group if neither you nor your children can read the Bible for yourselves?"

Buddu was silent a long time. Shanti had fallen asleep. But Shera strained his ears for his father's answer. At last he heard him say the great, the longed-for, word.

"All right, sahib, I shall send my son to school when the new term opens. But the girl must remain with her mother. According to your wish, Shera will be ready to go next week."

CHAPTER THREE

Fun at Boarding School

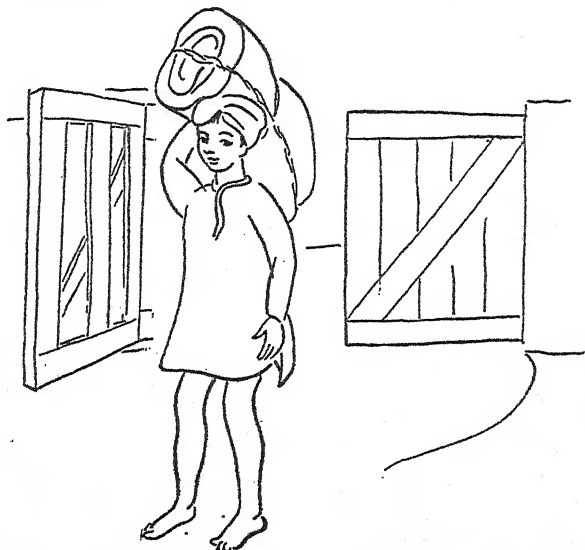
THE MOTOR BUS rattled and clattered along the Grand Trunk Road. It went no faster than twenty-five miles an hour, but Shera was almost breathless with the speed and wonder of it. He and Jalal were wedged in between a burly, bearded Sikh and a well-dressed Brahman college student. Shera noticed that in the good-natured traveling crowd no one seemed to mind that he was an untouchable.

"Perhaps this thing has come into their understanding that we are now Christians," he thought with a new feeling of hope in his heart.

The brakes ground shrilly, and the lurching bus came to a stop in front of a gateway with square brick pillars. Jalal and he wormed their way out of the bus. Once outside, Jalal climbed up to the top where great bundles, tin boxes, and even beds and bicycles were tied on in a towering pile. He pulled out Shera's thin bedding roll and a small bundle in which his mother had tied some fried lentils and a lump of brown sugar, and threw them down. The boy caught them and put the bedding roll on his head.

Shera remembered how troubled his mother had been about providing bedding to send with him to school.

"O Father of Shera," she had said anxiously to Buddu, "in this bone-breaking winter that is now past there was only one old ragged quilt for the children. Another will have to be



made for Shera. In the box I have two thin headshawls which have become very light in color through many washings. I can patch them and use them for the covers of a quilt. But a filling of two *seers*, which is four whole pounds, of cotton will cost more coins than have ever passed through my eyes in a year or ever have I seen in a dream! Give me your word of advice."

"Be not anxious, Mother of Shera!" Buddu had replied, "The hot season is here. He does not need a quilt now. I

shall borrow money and buy him a new rug to lie on and a good shirt and trousers."

So Buddu had gone off to the moneylender and borrowed ten rupees more. Since he could not write he put his thumb-mark on his old debt-paper. It added about three and a half dollars to his debt. He did not really know when he could pay it. He had given his son nine annas for his bus fare and eight annas, which Shera wrapped in a little rag and tied in the waist cord of his trousers, to give to the headmaster sahib of the Mission School for his two months' school fee.

After leaving the bus, Jalal, with Shera, walked fast, through the gate and along the rows of big shady trees. He was eager to see all his old friends before he went back home that night. He called to some boys who were studying on the veranda of the biggest brick building Shera had ever seen.

"Is Headmaster Sahib in his office or in the science room?"

"He is in the farthest wheat field with the eighth class," came the answer.

The Village of Service did not seem much like a village. It was all spread out, with neat broad roads and square plots of ground in which grew cauliflower, turnips, spinach and radishes, with little ditches of bright, running water between the plots. In front of the school building were more flowers than Shera had ever seen. A little distance behind was a cluster of mud houses, not crowded close together, but each with gardens and trees around it. Instead of dust and piles of cow dung all about, there were green fields and tiny patches of

flowers. Whichever way Shera looked he could see water. He saw no less than four wells as he followed Jalal toward the wheat fields beyond the village. They stopped at one of the wells where a boy about Shera's age was driving a pair of bullocks around in a circle. As they turned the creaking water wheel, the water was drawn up from the well in a series of iron buckets. The well platform was of cement, smooth and clean. The water fell from the iron buckets sparkling and clear into a covered tank. Near the bottom of the tank were shining brass faucets.

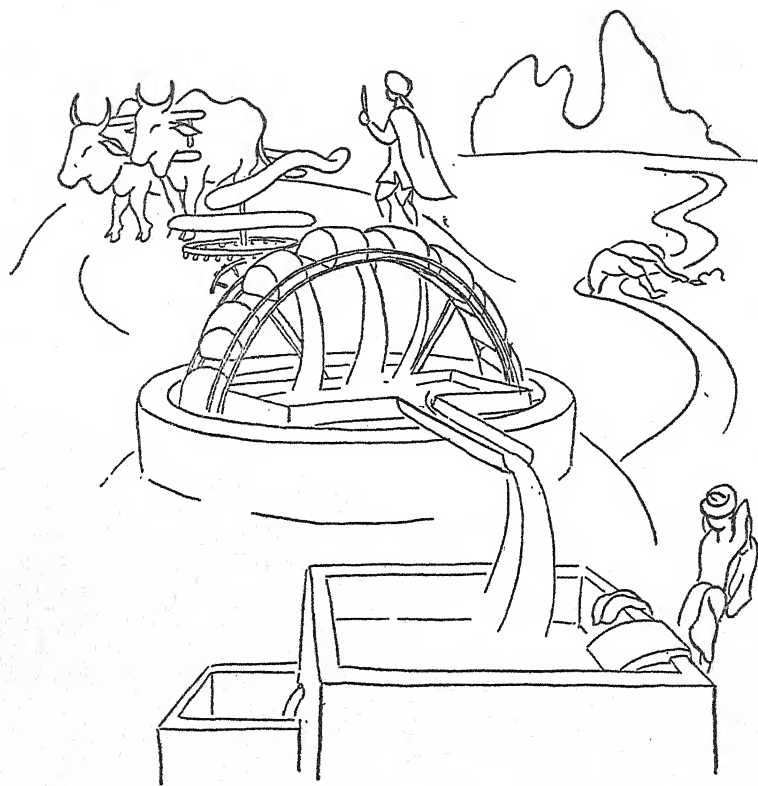
"Wash your hands and face," commanded Jalal smiling.

"Do you really mean that I may turn on the tap myself?" asked Shera, wondering at his new freedom.

The boy at the top of the well laughed heartily. "You old owl!" he said good naturedly. "Water is free here, and we have to use it, not only look at it. The masters are always giving us trouble about cleanliness."

Shera felt very clean as he walked with Jalal to the field where the headmaster and boys were working.

The headmaster was a big, strong man, just like some of the high-caste landowners. His dark face had a look of noble birth. His voice rang out in sharp commands to a dozen big boys who were scattered over two or three acres of wheat fields. They were cutting the tall golden wheat with big sickles. Another group of boys were turning water into a field of beautiful green grass that was to be used as fodder for the cattle. The little channels of bright water had to be



A PAIR OF BULLOCKS TURNED THE CREAKING WATER WHEEL

helped to run into every corner of the dry fields to reach the roots of the thirsty plants. No rain, or only a very little, would fall for four or five months yet. The boys had their broad hoes with short handles. They had to dig new ditches and then dam up the bigger channel and turn the water in different directions. Sometimes it overflowed and then Headmaster Sahib would seize his own heavy hoe and work like a giant till the dam held.

He stopped and straightened up, wiping the sweat from his face before he shook hands with Jalal. Shera could hardly lift his eyes, he was so frightened. The headmaster sahib put his hand gently on the boy's shoulder and turned up his face. "He touches me! To him I am not an outcaste!" thought Shera, wonderingly.

"If you are a strong, brave boy, and work hard, you will be very happy here. I shall put you in Musa's 'family.' He is one of the best leaders in the school. Musa," calling to one of the big boys, "please take Shera to your house and give him a bed. Let him help to get dinner so that he will feel quite at home."

Shera was led to the house in which lived a number of school boys in charge of Musa. He was shown his bed and where to put his clothes. He was allowed to help with the cooking and cleaning.

Shera made one bad mistake that day. He was scrubbing the big copper pot in which the boys had cooked the savory stew of turnips, potatoes and red peppers. Sitting on his heels,

he hitched himself back into a corner and stepped right against a little slip of a tree, breaking off some of the twigs. The boys yelled at him.

"Stupid owl! Look where you sit! That's our lemon tree that we're trying so hard to raise. What's the use of our putting bricks around it and watering it so carefully when you go and break it? Be more careful!"

"You see, Brother Shera," explained Musa, kindly, "we don't have any fruit here because I get only sixteen rupees a week to buy food for twenty boys. You can't get all you would like on about six dollars a week. If I buy flour and lentils, peppers, *ghi* and potatoes enough to fill you up, I can buy only a little milk and no fruit at all. We raise most of the vegetables ourselves. Headmaster Sahib cannot give more for each boy unless he sends some of us home. He has ten 'families' like ours to feed. We'd all rather not eat so much in order that we can have new boys come to school. We are trying to raise fruit trees in order to have oranges and lemons to eat for our health's sake."

"I wish we could have a goat," said Jindu. "Then we could have plenty of milk, at least for the littlest boys of the family. You, Buddi, and you, Abu, are tiny and dry like a grass blade. You could do with a little more flesh on your bones."

Shera had a hard time getting to sleep that night. He had a big lump in his throat and his eyes smarted. The boys had scolded and laughed at him again because he did not like sleeping alone in the top of a double-decker bed.

"We have to have two shelves to our beds," they explained, "because in that way we can have twice as many boys in school. We can't sleep two in a bed, because that is bad for our health."

That was a queer thing to say, Shera thought. Everybody slept two or three in a bed at his home. He himself was used to sleeping with his father. It was much more comfortable that way in the cold weather when you had only one quilt. Of course, now that the weather was getting hotter, they would soon have to move their beds outdoors. It was cooler sleeping alone in a bed, Shera agreed, but he felt scared. Besides he missed the animals that always slept near the family.

"I wish I could have Sundri, my goat, here. I wouldn't feel so lonely. I'd like taking care of her and she gives nearly three *seers* of milk a day. But if I took her away from home, our own babies would get thin like Abu and Buddi. No, I couldn't do that."

Homesickness is queer. It gets worse and worse, no matter how you try to choke it back. You keep thinking of the cooking-fire and your honored mother, and your heart sticks to thoughts of home so that it is hard to pull it away. For the first few nights Shera was lonely and smothered his sobs in his rug.

In the daytime Shera had lots of fun in school, even though he was older than the other children in the first class because he had not had a chance to study until he was ten. In the primary classes there were girls as well as boys. They were

the daughters of teachers and day pupils who came from nearby homes.

The boys and girls in his class were getting ready to put on the roof of a playhouse which they were building. It was so large that several children could get in it at once. The little girls were making things out of clay to furnish the house—water-jars, churns, and platters for food. Some of the boys were making clay animals—cows, buffaloes, and chickens. Shera made a goat and it was a good one.

Shera soon joined a group of boys who were writing on slates the plan for the roof-laying party. He wanted so much to learn to read and write.

"In my village," said a boy, "the house owner always calls the neighbors in to help him lay his roof. It takes lots of feet and hands to pound down the mud flat and hard and smooth. They sing and shout and have lots of fun."

"We could do that and invite the second and third classes."

"In our village they always have a feast when the roof is finished."

At the word "feast" the girls pricked up their ears. "We can make the bread-cakes and have a little stew of spinach, if you boys will build fireplaces for us. It is so easy that it is just work for our left hands."

As the children planned the feast, they never seemed to think about fixing places for the different castes to eat separately. Some of the day pupils were high-caste children. Shera wondered if after the party their mothers would make

them bathe as Sham Singh did after Shera touched him that day on the playground. Shera shuddered as he remembered.

The day they had their feast was a happy one for Shera. There was a committee to greet and seat the guests. Because he had been voted the cleanest boy in the class, they chose him to pass the food to the missionary sahib from America who was the principal of the school. The missionary's wife, the memsahiba, their son and their two little girls also came to the party. Tom, the boy, was just about Shera's age, though he was in third class. They liked each other right away. Tom asked Shera to sit next to him while they ate.

Tom could read the words of this song which the teacher had put on the blackboard. They were written in Urdu, the Indian language used in the school. Shera resolved to learn to read quickly and to climb to the next class, as his teacher had said that he could. He wished he could be in Tom's class.

On the King's birthday they were to have a holiday. Shera had learned by now that the King-Emperor of India lived in England, across the great sea. He knew his name was King George and he could sing with his class, "God Save the King."

Every afternoon he went out to the playing fields and watched the games of kubuddi, football and hockey. The big boys were practising for the matches in Moga town on the King's birthday when several schools were to compete for prizes. In every spare minute Shera and Tom played kubuddi or practised on the running track.

One day the games master noticed how well Shera^{*} could run. "You must enter the one-hundred-yard dash for junior boys," he said. "Practise hard and you may win for the school!"

"Won't the boys of the high-caste schools be angry if we win?" he asked his friends.

"Probably, but what do we care?" they answered.

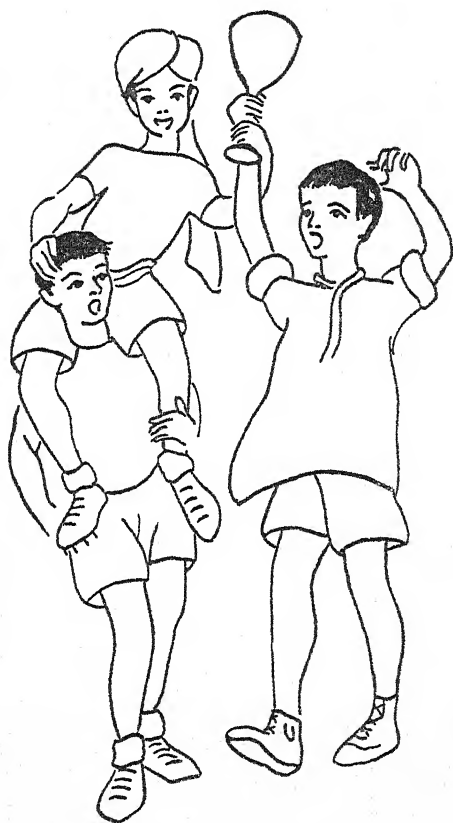
The expected holiday came and with it the sports in Moga. The boys from several schools, their masters, and their friends made a gay crowd in the town.

Arya School won the long jump with a record of sixteen feet, but Mission School was second. The high jump went to Khalsa School and the 220-yard dash to Dev Samaj School. As the temperature was over one hundred degrees in the shade, the records were good. When the 100-yard dash was run, Shera came in first; time, fourteen seconds.

After the races, the kubuddi, volley ball, football and hockey matches were played. The names of the winning teams in the games were announced.

"Kubuddi, Arya School. Volley ball, Khalsa School. Hockey, Mission School. Football, Mission School. The silver cup for hockey is awarded to Mission School for the second time. The football cup is awarded to Mission School for the third year in succession and becomes its permanent property."

The Mission School boys went wild with joy. They yelled and shouted. They lifted on their shoulders the winners of the jumps and dashes and the captains of the teams. They held the beautiful shining silver cups high in the air. Shera looked at the crowd of boys round about. The boys of the



Arya team and the Khalsa team pressed close to them. He couldn't help wondering if they were going to touch him by mistake. The thought almost spoiled the victory.

Suddenly a mean voice soared above the racket, "Sweepers, sweepers, they're nothing but sweepers, untouchables!"

work in the rooms or vegetable garden they cleaned the camel. Sh wished he could

a dozen others turned, clenching their with anger. The little boys looked angry too. His happy face flushed dark ra that a cloud of shame had dropped Then came Captain Musa's voice.

The nicest you earned his pay was so Every time he signature in his paise, which is added it all up metic at last. about thirty

fair. Let them bark!" And he laughed. were all laughing and shouting again. ournament and Headmaster Sahib came fight. But there wasn't any fight. The any dance with drum-beating which set aughing. The other prizes were dis- went home happy.

When he received There he paid

asked Musa, "Why didn't you let us d?"

For games
For rent
For station
For board

Total

This left him to the church, money. He for his school

We're every bit as good as they are. and brave and there were over two hundred have given them such a hot shoe-uld have remembered their maternal d have been a big fight and we could lines in the dust with their noses. But aster, did not strike back when he was ys, let's have our evening prayers and kingdom there is no untouchability."

er Masih, Lion of Christ. He stopped rightened and set himself to growing every day.

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CHAPTER FOUR

King Cobra

IN SPITE OF his name, Shera did not always act like a lion. The boys sometimes made fun of him, especially when he got discouraged and sulky over his failures. He enjoyed most of the things he did at school, but a few he found difficult.

Reading was easy for Shera, and he soon liked nothing better than to squat on his heels in a shady corner with a book. He especially liked stories about animals. If there had been only his own language, Urdu, to learn, Shera would have been promoted quickly. But he stuck when it came to the arithmetic lessons. He could not learn the combinations easily.

The Bible lessons he liked, especially when they were about courage. Master Sir could certainly tell a good hero tale. David, Gideon, and Joshua were Shera's favorites.

Work period was hard. Besides taking their turns at housework and family duties, the boys had to work on the farm or the school grounds two hours every day. Shera's turn was from eight to ten o'clock every morning. It was terribly hot. The temperature was climbing day by day toward one hundred and ten degrees in the shade, and you couldn't often

work in the shade. Sometimes they had to sweep school-rooms or verandas or roads. Sometimes they weeded the vegetable gardens or drove the oxen at the well. Sometimes they cleaned the stables and fed the cows, the buffaloes and the camel. Shera preferred the work with the animals. He wished he could have Sundri to milk and care for every day.

The nicest thing about this school and farm work was that you earned money by it. As Shera was quite big and strong, his pay was soon raised to the rate of the fourth-class boys. Every time he did two hours' work for somebody, he got a signature in his little book which meant he had earned two *paise*, which is about one cent. At the end of the month, he added it all up correctly. He began to see some use for arithmetic at last. He found that he had earned thirteen annas, about thirty cents, which was more than any boy in his class. When he received the money, he went to the principal's office. There he paid the following fees:

For games and sports	1 anna
For rent of books	2 annas
For stationery	1 anna
For board	7 annas
	<hr/>
Total	11 annas

This left him two annas. He decided to give half an anna to the church, leaving one and a half annas for spending money. He meant to save this money toward buying a goat for his school family.

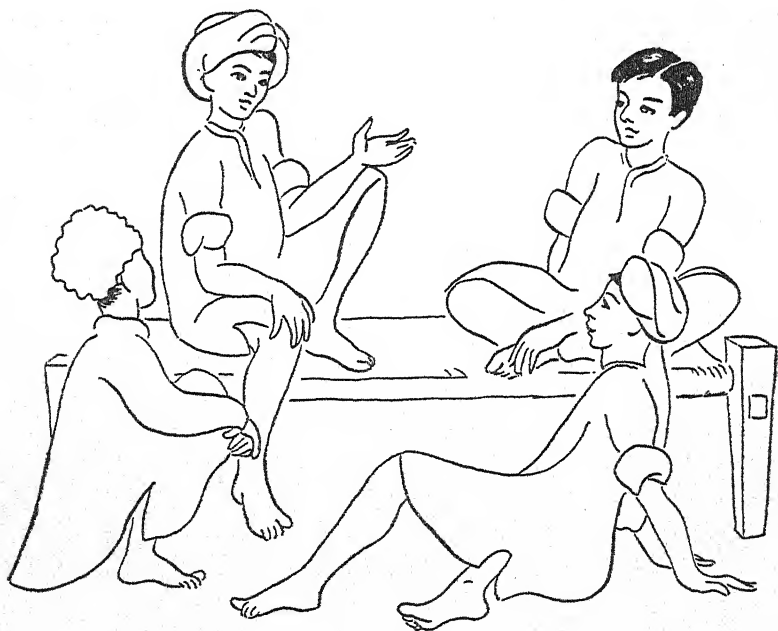
The missionary sahib told Shera that it really cost eighty annas, or about \$1.75, to keep him in school each month. "You pay eleven annas yourself, which is all you can do until you are older. Then you may earn enough to pay one-third of your expenses. Your father can pay only four annas now. So nearly four-fifths of the cost is really a gift from Christian people in America who want to help you get an education."

One of the things Shera liked best at school was the stories he heard. On nights when the big boys in his house did not have too much studying to do, they often told each other stories. It was fun to sit around on the beds out under the stars while Jindu or Feroz or Buta talked about their own experiences or told something they had read in a book or newspaper.

"Say, fellows," asked Musa one night, "did you read in the paper about a boy in the Central Provinces killing a panther?"

"Yes, I read it," said Buta. "He was only twelve years old and a herdboy. While he was watching his animals on the grazing ground far away from the village, a huge panther came bounding out from the edge of the jungle and pounced on one of the kids. Well, this boy pulled out his knife and sprang at the panther. The beast mauled him and gashed him and got him down several times, but in the end he killed the panther. When the villagers found the boy, he was pretty badly hurt, but that wicked old panther had eleven knife gashes in him."

"Last year I saw a leopard," said Jindu. "You know my village is quite near the mountains. It is all flat plain like this part of the Punjab, but we can see the foothills and the wild



jungle in the far distance. In clear weather we can see the snow-capped Himalayas. Well, last Christmas vacation I stopped at the mission girls' school in our district to take my sister home. The girls were playing out in their big yard which is fenced in with a high thick hedge. I was standing outside the hedge, waiting for my sister to pack her box. I was watching some little girls playing hopscotch, when I

noticed something moving in the hedge. It looked like a huge cat. I caught a gleam like flame color where the sun shone on its fur. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was a leopard! I ran to Miss Sahiba's house and she wouldn't believe what I told. Then I ran to the sahib. He got his gun. I slipped over on the other side of the hedge and got the little girls away. The sahib could not see the beast, but he trusted my word. He shot twice into the thick bushes where some twigs were moving. Believe me, he got the leopard! He took the skin to America and sold it to get money for his missionary work."

As Shera listened, he wished that he had an exciting story to tell, but it seemed that no adventures ever happened to him.

After three months at school Shera was promoted to second class.

One hot day it began to rain, the first that had fallen since he came to school.

"Shera, here is a story about a dog. Can you read it to us?" asked the teacher who knew that Shera liked animals.

Shera had just finished reading the story when a scratching was heard at the classroom door. One of the girls opened it, and there stood an old brown dog who came straight to Shera, pawed at his legs, and then ran toward the door.

"Please sir, she is a poor starving dog who makes her home in a pile of brush behind the stable. Sometimes I give her some food. I call her Kutti. May I see what she wants?"

The dog ran off when she saw the boy following her. But, before he reached the door, she came in again with something in her mouth. She laid it at Shera's feet, then ran out and brought in another. They were two wee grey-brown puppies nearly drowned by the rain.

"Oh," gasped Shera, "Kutti has brought me her new-born babies to take care of. I must make a bed for her and the pups in the corner of our veranda. They'll be safe there. May I go, sir?"

The master consented and Shera hurried off. He was delighted. At last he had pets.

The pups grew fast and seemed very intelligent. The mother dog was devoted to the boy who fed her every day. In the months that followed, Shera spent happy hours playing with them.

One afternoon in the winter, Shera had finished his housework and was sitting in the sun in a corner of the courtyard, the only boy at home. The others were all at school or in the fields.

Just outside the courtyard gate was a sort of village park, which the boys had made. Here they hoped some day to have a radio loud speaker to listen to in the evenings. It was a big oval green around which they had planted thick berry bushes. Outside the bushes ran an irrigation ditch. Shera could see a little baby girl playing beside the ditch, sailing wee paper boats in the small stream of sparkling water. It was Rani, the three-year-old daughter of Headmaster Sahib.

How pretty she was with her shiny brown hair and her short red and yellow jumper! She was the pet of all the boys.

Suddenly Shera noticed Kutti. The dog was acting very queerly. She was scratching and pulling at Shera's ankles, then running to the gate and back again, not barking. He stood up to see what was the matter. In the stillness of the



sunny afternoon he could hear a soft, swishing sound. It was not Rani's tinkling laughter. It was a rustle made by something moving in the dry leaves under the bushes. It started far off, a steady rustle, rustle, but it kept getting nearer and louder. In and out, in and out, came the swishing sound.

Shera knew what it meant. A snake! His breath sat down! He could not move. All his life he had known how King Cobra comes gliding, slithering through the leaves till he finds his victim. Then!

The cobra raised his head, not six feet from the playing baby. His hood was up, his strong body swayed. "O dear

God," prayed Shera, "don't let her look up! Give me time! Help me save her!"

He knew if she looked up she would be charmed by the dancing movement of the cobra and move nearer to him.

He knew what to do. He had read it in a book. He must get milk in a saucer and put it near the serpent. Then, while the snake's attention was distracted, he must snatch the baby away. But how? How? There was no milk in the house. They had no goat. Gulzar's house was at the other end of the park. Someone might have left milk on a shelf there.

Shera ran swiftly, softly, not daring to look back at Rani. It was a hundred-yard dash to Gulzar's house and back. Shera made it in record time. Creeping behind the great snake he laid the earthen saucer of milk before him. What if the cobra should strike at that brown arm that for a moment was so near him! But no, he swayed, he stooped, he drank of the milk. Shera caught Rani in his arms and ran swiftly to the safety of the school building.

Tom was the first person he met. Together they carried Rani to her father. It was Tom who told the story Shera had gasped out to him. In a few minutes Shera was made such a hero that he was quite uncomfortable.

"It was really old Kutti who told me about the snake," he explained, proudly. "Isn't she a wonderful dog? The pups are going to be even smarter."

The missionary sahib, Tom's father, gave orders that the school children were to keep away from their houses for a

while. He sent a man to a nearby village to call a snake charmer whom he knew.

It was fun to watch the snake charmer, Sain Das. Naked to the waist, with only a loincloth tied about him, his firm muscles and his lean body showed he was an athlete. In one



hand he carried a basket covered with a cloth. In his other hand was a flute made out of a gourd. The missionary sahib showed him where the cobra was last seen.

Ordering the school children and the missionary family to a safe distance, Sain Das placed his gourd flute to his lips and began the snake-charming tune. Then he stopped and sang, "Come, King Cobra, come! I will give you milk and honey. I will never harm you. Come!" Again came the weird tune from the flute.

There was a rustling in the leaves. Then the long body of the snake began to show. Soon he was before the charmer. He had a thick brown body, five feet long. Sain Das never let his eyes move from the eyes of the cobra. The snake advanced slowly till he was four feet away from the charmer. His head began to rise till it was a foot in the air. The wide cobra hood spread out. The head began to sway back and forth as it kept time rhythmically with the wailing tune. The piercing eyes of Sain Das, moving from side to side as the snake's head swayed, seemed to be putting the cobra into hypnotic sleep. On and on went the music, back and forth swayed the hooded head of the cobra. Slowly the head came down till the snake lay coiled at the foot of the charmer.

The music stopped. With a lightning-like movement, Sain Das' hands shot out. In an instant he had hold of the end of the snake's tail. His other hand slid along the long body until it reached the throat of the cobra. Pressing gently on the throat he caused the creature to open his mouth. Sain Das displayed with great glee the poisoned fangs of King Cobra which were ready a few minutes ago to strike death, but now were harmless in the charmer's strong grip. He dropped the cobra into his basket which he bound with a cloth.

"Here are two rupees for your good work, Sain Das," said Missionary Sahib.

"Here is another rupee for my thanks," said Headmaster Sahib. Turning to Shera he said, "You are proving yourself worthy of your name."

"Tom," whispered the memsahiba while they were watching this fascinating scene, "I wish you would find out what Shera wants more than anything else. I should like to make him a present."

"O Mother!" Tom answered eagerly, "I know already. He wants a goat. Oh, please get him one right away."

Two weeks later Tom went over to the railway station on his bicycle with his home-made trailer attached. When he came back he had a beautiful black and white nanny-goat tied in the trailer. His mother had sent to Etah for it, about three hundred and fifty miles away. A missionary lived there who raised better kinds of goats and chickens so that village people could get more and better milk and eggs.

The whole school seemed to see that goat before Shera did. Tom led her right into the courtyard where Shera and his partner in housework that day were patting, tossing and baking the bread.

"Here, Shera!" shouted Tom, "Here's an old nanny-goat that gives five *seers* of milk a day. What do you think of that? She's yours. Take her." Shera was so surprised and delighted that for a moment he couldn't express his thanks.

That is how Musa's family had milk to drink. Once that hot weather they even had ice cream made from goat's milk in the memsahiba's ice cream freezer.

CHAPTER FIVE

Shanti Tries to Follow

THE MOTHER of Shanti sat in the mud-walled enclosure in front of the house they had built more than a year ago at Umedpur. She was seated on a low stool made of rope woven on a square frame of wood. Her bent knees, draped in dark red striped gingham, held tightly the wriggling body of Shanti who squatted on the sun-baked ground between her mother's feet. Shanti's black hair, shiny and dripping with oil, was standing out stiffly all over her head. It made a strange frame for her pretty, oval face.

"Make patience," said Shanti's mother. "Your hairs have been washed and the oil applied. See, already I am beginning to plait the braids."

Under her flying fingers the tiny tight plaits grew quickly. Now ten or more were finished and all one side of Shanti's head was covered with shiny close-crisscrossed strands. Just in front, above her forehead, Mother had unwoven one or two braids and combed the hair. Shanti thought this strange. It had always been tightly braided before.

"It is a thing of much trouble," complained her mother, "that I must do your head once every seven days. If you would not play in the dust, then your braids would stay



smooth for two sevens. Do you not eat shame that you are so restless? You are now grown up and no longer a little girl. You are already of the age of ten years."

A face, peeping under dull red head drapery, appeared in the low door of the wall. It was Shanti's friend Sukhi, Jalal's sister, who had just come home from school for Easter vacation.

"Come with quickness, Shanti," she called. "The big yellow dog has made a nest in the village wall for her new puppies. The girls have all gone to see." And she ran away.

"I have come," called Shanti, and her bare heels impatiently rubbed a hollow in the dust.

"It is a thing of sorrow," sighed her mother, "that you should wish to leave me. Alas, the time of departing from your father's house will come in a breath!"

Shanti sat up suddenly. With a quick motion she threw her yellow head drapery over her newly dressed hair. It fell over her shoulders, covering her body to the waist where the full baggy trousers were gathered. She stole a glance at her mother and saw tears in her eyes.

She thought, "Is it her meaning that my marriage is about-to-be-made?"

She did not ask any question. That would not be proper at all. She understood well that it is not the custom for mothers and girls to talk of such things as weddings.

She ran into the hut to get the baby. One of her chief tasks was taking care of the little ones. It would never do to go off to play without having one of them along.

In the corner she saw a little pile of crisp new cloth. How gay and pretty it was! There were two pieces of thin yellow lawn, several striped calicoes, a piece of white lawn with tiny pink flowers and green leaves painted on it and—oh wonder!—a piece of bright red cheesecloth.

The smallest baby was asleep, but the big baby, her brother, was fretting. She straddled him across her slender hip and ran off, half limping under his weight, anxious to join the other girls.

As she passed the houses and shops of the village, she wondered about the gay cloth. Her father, though he was a good

worker for his new master in Umedpur, seldom earned more than the wheat and pulse that his large family ate.

The little girl thought, "It is a thing of many years since I have seen red cloth and a head drapery such as that painted *chaddar* in my house. It was on that day on which the marriage of my father's youngest sister was made, before we became Christians. Then I saw the wedding clothes."



She made her way through the narrow, slimy lanes, shifting the heavy child from one hip to the other, till she came to the place where the banyan tree spread itself outside the mud

wall. There, in a little dusty hollow under the big roots, wriggled the fat puppies. Many little girls, leaning close, hid them from view.

Shanti, tired out with her long run, squatted on her heels in the shade of the great tree. "My breath has sat down," she gasped to Sukhi, who took the baby from her and put him down to play on the ground.

Rajji and Phulmani left their babies to roll in the dust with the puppies and joined Shanti and Sukhi, sitting very close, knee to knee, shoulder to shoulder.

With a "pressed-down" voice Sukhi spoke. "Is it true news that your marriage is about-to-be?"

The other little girls fluttered and whispered together, but Shanti only tossed her head with a fine air of scorn and answered, "How may I know? Do you consider that my mother would give me news of this thing?"

Secretly, under her *chaddar*, she was feeling her hair and her ears. Yes, her hair in front was combed out instead of braided. That was a sign of marriage. On each ear was the row of new little holes all along the rim besides the one in the lobe which she had had since she was a baby. So far she had only two earrings—the big kind, each with a second little ring hanging from it, which Shanti knew was the sign of a girl not yet married. She wondered if her father would give her enough earrings to fill all those new holes when she was married.

"I was in the *bazaar* when two of the Christian men, meet-

ing the headman, gave the news that after fifteen days a wedding is about-to-be," whispered Rajji.

"It is a true thing," giggled Sukhi. "Let us see your hairs."

Shanti, taking off her *chaddar*, proudly displayed her little triangle of combed hair.

"A true thing, a true thing," shouted the little girls, jumping up and down and forgetting to be still and secret. The questions now came thick and fast.

"How many silver lobe-rings will your father give you?"

"How many rim-rings will be attached to you?"

"Will there be brass nose-ornaments and a silver nose-ring?"

"My sister had nineteen silver bangles."

"Has your father given you more anklets?"

"How much will be the expense of the feast?"

Now Phulmani was the center of attention because she was fifteen years old and had been married, and was even now just come back from her father-in-law's house in a far village to visit her mother. The other little girls asked her many questions about wedding feasts, the spending of hundreds of rupees, the gay clothes and ornaments, the gifts and the fine food.

"I wish I were about-to-be-married," sighed Rajji.

"Do not do envy," advised Sukhi. "This matter of marriage is not all a thing of joy. To your father will be great spending of rupees. To Phulmani's father has been a debt ever since, which is a sin for a Christian, the preacher says. I

am already of fourteen years, but my mother and father will not make my marriage."

"Why not?" asked Shanti.

"As you all know, my father has great honor in this Christian community," boasted Sukhi. "He is *lambardar*, and he knows much about the law of God and the customs of the Christians. My brother Jalal, who has finished school, says it is not worthy of Christians to make the marriage of girls of less than sixteen years. He says those who do this sin eat stumbling because they cannot themselves read the commands of Jesus Christ. That is why, you know well, I have been sent to the girls' school."

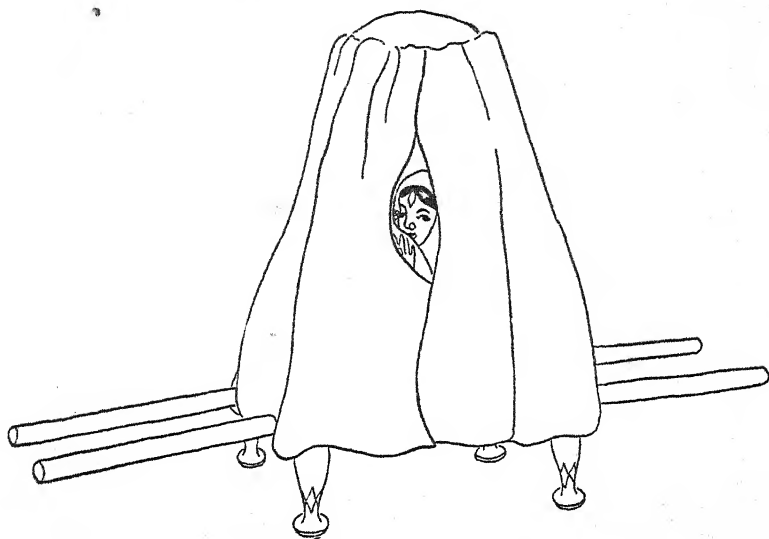
"Ah, the memsahiba made a promise that I, too, may sit in that girls' school," said Shanti.

"You cannot if the bearers are to carry you away in the red marriage chair. Can she, Phulmani?"

Phulmani explained, "Before they cause you to sit in the red *doolie*, you must learn the wailing which the bride always wails when she leaves her father's house. You must leave the things of childhood. The school that the memsahiba speaks of is not for those who are married."

"Were you sad, to go away?" asked Shanti, thoughtfully.

"The sons away from the fireplace are strangers," quoted Phulmani. The little girls understood her meaning, for the village people of the Punjab feel homesickness keenly. Shanti started home thoughtfully, wondering how she would feel to leave her mother and father and go far away to her father-in-



law's house. The idea of the wedding and pretty clothes did not seem so attractive now.

When Shanti got home, the sun was setting. Where the broad road that leads to faraway towns comes close to the gate in the wall of Umedpur, she heard the rattle of a bamboo cart. The horse's hoofs stopped, and a commotion arose. Soon she saw coming into their lane quite a crowd of small boys, then Jalal, and with him—could it be?—her own brother Shera!

"Honored Mother," explained Shera, "I have come for the harvest vacation of eight days. Is my honored father still in the fields?"

"Yes, my son, he works till his back is breaking, cutting the wheat. He will not return till dark."

"I will go to help him."

Shera was already starting, but his mother held him back.

"Eat first, son. You are weary from your journey."

"I will take just a bread-cake and go," he said sturdily. "We shall finish the cutting and binding, my father and I. I have learned quick ways to do it in my school."

"I thought boys learned to read in school," said Shanti, puzzled, after her brother had gone. Her mother thought, "What a big boy my son is! His age is less than twelve years, and how clever he seems already!"

Father and son came in after dark. Supper was soon over. Then Shera must get his books from the bundle of bedding he had brought and show them how he could read. He read them a story about a little boy and his cow and buffalo and goat and hen, another story about a parrot, and one about a pet dog. He told them a Bible story and answered their questions about school. Before he slept, too, he must see and admire Shanti's new clothes and hear about the plans for the wedding. He taught them to sing a new psalm.

O Lord, show thy way unto thy servant.
Of thy truth I will do a following.

As she lay in her bed with her mother and the babies, the words sang themselves over in Shanti's troubled mind.

I will do a following, I will do a following,
I will do a following of Jesus Christ.

"That means," she thought, "to obey the orders of Jesus Christ. This thing of my marriage is against the ways of the Christians. Oh, I want to read in the school for girls and learn there the Christian ways!"

For several days Shera worked and played and read and talked. One evening, when he had gone to Jalal's house, Shanti heard her father say, "Mother of Shera, the school which the boy calls the Village of Service seems to be different from others. I have seen the landowners' sons who have read for years in school. They have learned to fool away their time in playing cards and to despise the work of the fields. My son is not afraid to turn his hand to any work. He says that at the Village of Service toil in fields and gardens is part of their classwork. Six hours they read and two hours they work. It is a good thing!"

"He has learned, also, many things of the customs of Christians and the will of God," said the mother proudly.

"Yes," Buddu sighed, "I asked him what was the custom of the Christians about the marriage of children, and he told me, respectfully, it is true, but in plain words, that this marriage-to-be of our daughter is contrary to the custom of the Christians. What can we do? The plans are made."

"Oh, Father of Shera," replied the mother in alarm, "To set aside a marriage contract is no easy matter. It would bring shame upon the bridegroom and ourselves. There is surely nothing we can do to change it now."

"The young man and his family are Christians. Perhaps

they would be willing to put off the marriage until our daughter is sixteen," said Buddu thoughtfully.

"But the gifts!" exclaimed the mother. "We have already spent many rupees for clothing and gifts."

"The gifts could be sold," replied Buddu. "The clothes, except for the red bridal *chaddar*, may be for the girl to wear at school."

"It troubles me. In all my life I have never heard of such a thing," said the mother. "The bridegroom's family also has spent many rupees for gifts and they will be angry."

There was a long pause after this. Then Buddu said, "This is what I will do, Mother of Shera. When the missionary sahib who visits the villages comes—and I have heard that he and his family will camp here next week—we will ask him concerning the marriage-to-be of our daughter. If he says that it is against the customs of the Christians, then we will request the bridegroom to wait until our daughter is sixteen. Since he also is a Christian, he may agree. If he does, we will arrange with the memsahiba for Shanti to go to school."

That is how it happened that, after the harvest vacation, Shera, feeling very responsible and experienced, took his sister, Shanti, by cart and by railroad train to the very door of the girls' school and then went back to the Village of Service, nineteen miles away, in time for the opening of school on the second day of May.

CHAPTER SIX

Shanti Runs Away

SHERA had brought Shanti to the mission girls' school. The two stood by the gate, looking around the quadrangle. In one corner a group of girls were playing lion-and-goat, which is just like cat-and-mouse. At one end little children were playing on swings and seesaws. By the well, some older girls were washing and oiling the hair of the little ones. In the veranda several girls were winding and knitting bright-colored wools.

Shera thought, "With the first money I earn this year, I'm going to buy my sister a pair of knitting needles. I think she is going to like this school."

The miss sahiba, the lady missionary who was the head of the school, came to greet Shanti. She showed Shera where to put his sister's bedding roll.

"Saina," she called, "let Shanti help you girls make dolls."

In a minute, Shanti was sitting with a group. They had some bits of old cloth which had been cut and sewed in the shape of dolls' heads, bodies, arms and legs. They were stuffing them with cotton they had picked in the fields.

"Here is the paint. Let me make the faces." Saina had water-color paints in little clay saucers. Shera noticed that the



brushes were the kind they made at Moga and sold to other schools. He had helped gather the hair that came out of the tail of the school's camel. He would soon learn to bind the camel's hair with wire to a stick of reed that grew by the canal bank.

"I have brought some black yarn to make their hair with," said Firoza. "Here, Shanti, you may have this doll that I have made. Here are some bits of cloth for her *kurta*." Shanti set to work to make a long shirt for the doll.

"Let's get some dye and color these faded pieces of cloth," suggested Esther.

"I'm going to make a cradle for my baby," said Hukmi. "I have learned how to weave tape, and I hope I can find some bits of wood for the frame."

Shera saw that his sister was getting acquainted. He slipped away, after giving to the missionary lady the coins his father had sent for Shanti's school fees, and took a bus for the nineteen-mile ride to his own school.

In the days that followed Shera earned enough to buy a pair of pretty, rose-red knitting needles. He kept them a secret, and looked forward to the next holiday when he thought he could get permission to take them to his sister. How surprised she would be!

Suddenly, one day, his happy dreams were shattered. He was called to the sahib's office.

"Here is a telegram, Shera, from the girls' school. It says your little sister and another girl have run away. It is thought they must have come along this road. If they were trying to get home to Umedpur, they would have to pass through here. I am sending two of the older students, Barkat Masih and Sardar, to hunt for the girls. I want you to go with them and do your best to find your sister. It won't be an easy trip, but I am sure you will be brave."

Shanti running away! Shanti lost, perhaps in danger! How could it have happened?

This is how it happened. Shanti seemed quite happy at school for a few days. She looked forward to each afternoon playtime when she and her new friends could make and dress

their dolls. Shanti had many new ideas to add to their games, too.

"Listen, girls," she said one day, "let's have amulets for our dolls. You know mothers always hang them around their children's necks to ward off the Evil Eye. My mother put mine on when I was a baby. She paid the priest two rupees for it."

She pulled out her own charm to show. It was a tiny oblong box of silver which was tarnished almost black, and it hung on a dark blue cord around her neck.

"You'll have to throw that away pretty quickly," said Esther disgustedly. "Don't you know it isn't Christian to wear it?"

Shanti hid it quickly. She did not understand at all what Esther meant, and she felt frightened at the thought of losing her charm.

The other girls, although they knew it was superstitious to believe in black magic, thought it would be fun to have charms for their dolls.

"I don't like it," protested Esther, who was the daughter of a minister and had been taught in Christian ways at home. "Wearing charms means that you are praying to some spirits to take care of your baby. It is to God we pray."

The others paid no attention. They thought it would be all right to play at "magic," and anyway amulets would make pretty ornaments for the dolls.

"I have quite a lot of silver paper that the miss sahiba gave

me. She saved it from a box of candy that came from America for her Christmas."

It was fun to write magic words on paper. Shanti made up the charm words for the girls and then told them what to write. They folded the paper again and again till it made flat, thick rectangles. Then they carefully covered them with the bits of silver paper.

"What's this you are making?" It was the voice of one of the older girls. The little ones tried to hide the amulets.

"You naughty little girls! Playing with charms! You will get into trouble if you don't throw them away at once." She caught sight of the cord around Shanti's neck. "Why, I do believe the new girl is wearing one! Well, it will be taken from her soon enough."

Shanti was puzzled and frightened. She did not know what it all meant. She was afraid something dreadful would happen to her if her charm were taken away. When she went to bed that night Shanti felt as lonely as Shera had on his first night at school. She longed for her home and parents. She clutched her amulet closely as she lay in the dark. It was something from home.

She began to think she did not like school so well after all. By the next morning she was more homesick than ever. So she and Munia, who was also a new little girl, decided that they would run away. Shanti was sure they could get to Umedpur quite easily. The way had seemed short when her brother had brought her.



THERE WERE FEW PEOPLE IN THE BAZAAR

Early in the morning, before anyone was awake, the two girls slipped out of the gate and hurried as fast as they could along the highway that ran past the school. Soon they came to a big market town called Kana. There were few people in the *bazaar*. Munia kept stopping to look at fascinating new things in the pushcarts.

"Oh, look, Shanti! See these little round mirrors! I like this one with the green frame, don't you?"

"I like the rose-colored one better. O shopkeeper, how much do you take for these mirrors?"

"Ten *paise*," was the answer. It reminded Shanti that they had no money at all. How would they ever get to Umedpur? She pulled Munia along.

"Did you see those cunning little scissors, Shanti? They cost two annas. I wish I could have some. It is such fun to make pictures by cutting paper into pretty shapes. We never have more than one or two pairs of scissors for the whole class in school."

"Don't be silly, Munia. If we had two annas, we could get a seat in a motor or a cart going toward home."

When they stood in front of the shop of the dyer, Shanti had an idea. The dyer and his wife were very busy. In every one of the great iron pots over the fires were yards and yards of cotton cloth, bubbling and boiling in bright yellow, or green, or purple dye. The dyer was wringing out a *dhota* of lovely flame color. It would make a loincloth for some *sadhu*, or holy man, for they always wear that color. There

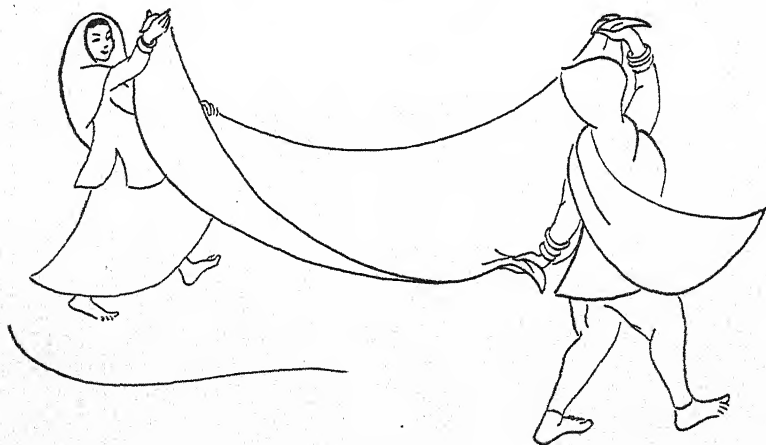
were bright-colored piles of *pugris*, the turbans used by men, and *chaddars*, the head shawls worn by women. Several pieces of cloth had been wrung out of the last rinse and were lying in twisted coils on a bench. Shanti noticed that there was no one to dry them. She spoke shyly to the woman.

"O dyer, where are your daughters?" she asked. "Why are they not waving the cloth in the air to dry it?"

"They have fever," said the dyer crossly.

"O dyer, we can do this work for you. Will you give us some *paise*?"

The dyer was glad enough to get help. Munia and Shanti carefully unwound the beautiful flame-colored cloth, keeping it well off the ground. They found a place by the side of the road where the crowd was thin. They held the cloth above their heads. Shanti ran four yards away till the cloth was taut



between them. They pulled it out to its full-yard width between their hands. Then they waved it, up and down, from side to side. How lovely it was in the sunshine! As it dried, Shanti was fascinated with its changing, flowing color. The next piece was a green *sari* six yards long. It would make a lovely draped dress for some girl.

They got very tired and their arms ached. The scorching sun made their heads ache and the bright colors made them dizzy. "I am getting fever, I think," whimpered Munia.

The dyer gave them each an anna and told them where the bus stand was. There was a crowded motor going to Ajanta. "That is only a *kos* away from my village," whispered Shanti, happily. "We can walk that mile and a quarter easily." And they squeezed in.

When the man came around to collect the fares, he laughed at them for thinking one anna was enough to go to Ajanta.

"Won't it even take us to Moga?" asked Shanti.

No indeed, it was only enough to get to Kokri, about seven miles along the road towards Moga, the driver told them. There, at a lonely crossroads, he put them down, two scared, tired little girls. They started to walk toward home.

It was late afternoon when they saw a gypsy camp by the side of the road. Several families of gypsies were preparing to spend the night there. The women wore bright-colored waists and long full skirts that swung in pretty folds about their ankles as they walked. Some of them were taking

burdens off the donkeys' backs and some were cooking, while the men lay stretched on the ground, resting.

"They are the wandering people," whispered Munia. "I am afraid of them."

But Shanti was curious and also hungry. The bread-cakes, baking, smelled so good. She crept closer.

"Do you feel hunger, little girls?" said one gypsy woman in a wheedling voice. "Come, I will give you bread."

They could not resist. They ate their fill of the bread offered them, and the gypsy gave them each a banana. That was a great treat. They soon lost their fear. The gypsies seemed kind and promised to take them home. Soon the tired girls fell asleep on an old rug that the woman spread out for them.

The next day the gypsies got them up early and started to travel in the opposite direction. Shanti and Munia began to be afraid they would never get home. As the day wore on they grew more and more frightened. The gypsy women were cross, and scolded them when they asked questions.

Meanwhile, the boys from Moga had tramped for hours in the terrible heat of noon and afternoon. They did not dare to take a bus for fear they would miss some village where the girls might be resting. Sometimes they took a *tuntum* from village to village. The springless two-wheeled cart gave them some relief from walking in the heat. Often they walked a mile across the fields to inquire, but they found no trace of the runaways.

"I have a new plan," suggested Barkat Masih. "There is a bus line running from Kana to Ajanta. Let us take the next bus that passes for Kana and inquire there."

"Perhaps the bus driver will remember if they went with him this morning," suggested Sardar.

As they waited for a bus, the two older students told Shera all they had been reading in the newspapers.

"So many children have been kidnapped lately. Every few days I read of some girl or boy who has been enticed away from home," said Sardar.

"Yes, I heard the sahib's friend, Sardar Sant Singh, telling about it the other day. He has been made special officer to round up the kidnappers. He says there is a regular gang of them. They buy the children from the gypsies and sell them to another gang in the United Provinces."

Just then the Kana bus came along. They hailed it and got in. Yes, the driver's helper remembered the little girls. He had put them down at Kokri.

"Take us there, too," ordered Barkat Masih. As the bus was not crowded, the boys stretched out for a nap. It was dark, and they were asleep when they passed the gypsy camp.

At Kokri they found Christian friends who gave them food and a place to sleep. They also told them disquieting news. No one had seen the girls, but a tribe of gypsies had passed through the village that morning, going north.

"They must have camped four or five miles from here. Strange, you did not see them!"

"Oh, why did we all go to sleep?" thought Shera. He was getting very anxious. He woke at the first hint of dawn, and roused the others. He found a *tumtum* driver who was willing to take them. Before they started, the boys knelt down and Barkat Masih prayed to God the Father to guide them and help them.

It was pleasant riding in the early morning, before the scorching sun turned the sky into a dome of red-hot copper. They passed a grove of mango trees. Shera would have liked to spend the hot day in the thick shade of the grove! As the sun rose, he could see a caravan on a road, leading east, which they had crossed a short time before. Silhouetted against the eastern sky, the long string of camels passed, one by one, evenly, regularly. "One, two, three, four." Shera counted up to thirty-seven and still only half the caravan had passed. Where were they going? Were they laden with rugs and brass vessels from Kabul, or had they sold them in Lahore to carry back grain and spices? At the thought of distant lands, he started to dream of travel and wandering. He caught his breath as he remembered that Shanti might even now be on her way to the south. She was too little for wandering. She would not like it. She would be frightened and lonely.

"There they are!" Sardar pointed suddenly to a moving group of people far away across the fields to the right of the road. "What shall we do now? If we all follow them in the *tumtum*, they will suspect something and hide the girls."

"I think we could get to that mango grove without being noticed. See, there is a little cart road leading to it," said Barkat Masih.

Shera had a bright idea. "You big men and the horse and cart could hide in the grove. I'm small and won't be noticed crossing the fields. I'll go and find my sister."

His words were braver than his feelings. When he had left his friends and stepped out from the shelter of the trees, he was as scared as a boy could be. Running across the bare fields, he seemed to himself the biggest and most conspicuous object in the landscape. His long shadow quivered behind him in the dazzling sunshine.

He could see that the gypsies had stopped for a rest in the shade of a tree not far from a big well. There was little shelter in the country he had to cross. The crops were all harvested weeks ago, and the fields were burned hard and brown in the heat. There were a few trees here and there in the fields. Their shadows showed sharp black against the hot earth. He ran over the hard dirt clods, from one tree to another, till he was close to the gypsies. They had stretched themselves on the ground in the shade. He wondered if they were asleep.

His heart leaped. Two little figures moved out from the group. They stooped and lifted big water jars to their heads. Gracefully they walked toward the well, balancing the jars carefully. The first one was Shanti! No one of all the girls who went to the well for water in Umedpur ever looked pret-



tier than his little sister. He knew just the curve of her brown arm lifted to the water jar.

The well was farther away from the gypsies than he had thought at first. Now he saw that it was partly hidden by trees. From his own tree to the well was only a short sprint. Could the girls make it?

Shera breathed a prayer and ran toward the girls beside the well. The gypsies never stirred.

"Girls," he gasped, "drop your jars and run for that tree."

They were quick, much smarter than he had hoped. In no time at all they were climbing into the *tumtum*.

"Lucky we have such a good fast horse," said Barkat Masih as they bumped and bounced in the springless cart over the rutty road. "Here we are at the highway. They'll never dare follow us now. They know the police are after them."

Shera pulled out a little bundle he had tied at the end of his shirt. "It is bright red knitting needles for you, sister. But please stay at school and learn to knit."

Before long the girls were at the school again and safe. Shanti explained to the miss sahiba why they had run away and how she feared her charm would be taken from her. "I understand," said the miss sahiba, smiling. "Shanti, I want you and Munia to sleep in the little room next to mine for a while. You can come in to me at bedtime every night. You may take your dolls to bed with you tonight. Tomorrow I will tell you why followers of Jesus Christ do not depend upon charms and magic for safety. Come now to evening prayers, girls!"

They sang that night the Fifty-sixth Psalm. What a comforting tune it was! They sang the chorus over and over because they liked it so much. How grand it sounded, with the whole school singing and the rhythm of the soft, hand-beaten drums keeping them all in time! Shanti hummed the psalm after she was in bed.

What time I am afraid, what time I am afraid,
I will put my trust in Thee, O Lord.

Then, cuddling her rag doll, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Honoring Christmas

"GREAT DAY! Great Day!" The exciting words were on everyone's lips. The Great Day, so-called in Hindu and other languages, is the birthday of the Lord Jesus. Not only Christians, but also many Hindus, Sikhs and Mohammedans, remember the Great Day by sending Christmas cards and gifts to their friends. This is partly out of piety, but they also have great respect for Jesus Christ.

Long before early in December, preparations for Great Day had begun. Every spare minute of the boys in the Village of Service. The children in the kindergarten were making paper chains. Special projects had been chosen by each class. One was

Decorating the school hall and church with illustrated Bible stories and paper bells and lanterns. The other was making safe many gifts as possible for poor children in the nearby vil-

lages. The boys of fourth class decided to give their gifts to village school children of every religion: Sikhs, Hindus, and Mohammedans as well as Christians. They took old newspapers and cut and sewed them to make little books. In them they pasted pictures which they had painted themselves. If

They were lucky enough to get any of the American maga-

zines Tom's mother saved for the school, they cut out colored pictures from them and pasted brown paper frames around them. Fortunately a package of small Bible pictures had come to Tom from a junior church-school class. So it was possible to have a picture of Jesus in each book.

Shera was getting on very well in school. In less than a year he had been promoted to third class, and now, half way through his second year in school, he was allowed to be in fourth, which was now Tom's class, for reading and for project work.

In another way he was very bright. He was good at earning and saving money even though he was rather slow at arithmetic. It was because of this cleverness that temptation came to him.

He wanted very much to buy a tin trunk or box in which to keep his books and extra clothes. The older boys each had one, and he was twelve now. He had a special treasure, too, to keep in such a box. It was a certificate he had earned in the hot-weather vacation.

The older boys had been asked to try to teach at least one grown-up person to read. They were given copies of the new primer for adults and shown how to make it interesting. Shera begged for one. Since he had learned to read so easily himself, he was allowed to try to teach someone else. By the end of vacation he had helped his cousin, who was nineteen, to finish reading the *Key to Learning*, as the primer was called. Most wonderful of all, under his teaching his honored mother

learned as fast as Shera himself had in school. So for a Christmas present he was taking her the *Gospel of Mark* in large print, with a beautiful purple cover.



His certificate said he had taught two adults to read. It had a gold border. He certainly needed a box in which to keep it safe. He had saved one rupee, fifteen annas. Most of the money he had earned from his goat. In the hot-weather vacation, when many of the boys of Musa's family were away, the goat's milk was not needed. He bargained with two orphan boys, who had to stay at school, to take care of the goat. They drank some of her milk for their wages and sold the rest for him.

He had the trunk all picked out in the tinsmith's shop. It

was painted a beautiful bright blue. Its price was two rupees, four annas, just five annas more than he had! He could think of no way to earn more just now. He had spent his last *paisa* for the gospel for his mother. He wanted so much to take that trunk home for the holidays. He must find some way.

His chance came at the school Christmas celebration, the night before the pupils left for their homes. On the platform there were two "trees." They were made from branches of the tamarisk, a tree which has minute gray-green scales on slender branches instead of leaves. Tom said they were not much like real Christmas trees. There were plenty of cedars and pines in the mountains where his school was, but it would cost too much to bring them down. So they did the best they could with these dry, dusty branches. They made them quite gay with bright paper chains.

Under one tree were piled several hundred small gifts for the children of the school. All these gifts were bought by Tom and his mother with money sent from America. There had been enough, too, to have a Christmas dinner of rice and curried meat and oranges for everybody at the school.

There were no gifts under the other tree. Over it hung a placard in red and gold: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The most exciting part of the evening was when the class representatives marched up, two by two, carrying baskets overflowing with the gifts they had made for others. They piled under the tree homemade rattles, wooden animals cut out with a jigsaw, marbles made from clay, bags, books,

SHERA OF THE PUNJAB

er flowers—hundreds of Christmas gifts to bring joy to
ages where Christmas was hardly known.

was all spoiled for Shera because his mind was on his
ppointment in not getting the tin trunk. He could not
k of others because his thoughts were filled with himself.
was still trying to find a plan for getting five annas.

fter Christmas songs and a Christmas story, Tom dressed
as Santa and gave out the presents from the other tree.
kindergarten received rubber bunnies and cats; first class
balls; second class, wooden tops; third class, marbles.

ourth class stood up in a long uneven line, the whole
ty-nine of them crowded close together. The memsahiba
it to help Santa. The wicked idea came to Shera as he
od right in the middle of the line. This class was getting
best gifts of all, a small mirror-and-comb set for each boy.
ra knew they cost three annas each in the *bazaar*. A voice
ned to say inside of him, "If you could get two extra, you
ld surely sell them for five annas."

n the confusion it was easy to slip back of the line and put
hand through between two other boys. The memsahiba
a gift into his hand, and Santa put one in the hand of the
t boy. A few seconds later, Shera was in his own place.
n gave him a special smile with the package. He slipped
h packages up his sleeve. Then, a little farther down the
e, out came Shera's hand again for a third gift.

Is that the last one, Mother?" whispered Tom at the end
the line. "There are two more boys."

"I am sure that I tied up thirty-nine gifts for this class. Yes, here is the slip with *thirty-nine* written on it." The mem-sahiba was puzzled. "I can't understand how I made such a mistake."

Then she whispered to the two boys at the end of the line that she would buy them something tomorrow. In spite of their disappointment, they managed to smile as the class went back to their places.

Through the rest of the distribution of gifts, Shera was planning what he would do. He would slip out early and hide his extra gifts in his bed under the rug. When the other boys got home, he would pretend to be asleep. Tomorrow was going-away day. Many of the boys would leave at six in the morning, as they lived great distances away. Umedpur was so near, he would not need to leave till afternoon. He would have plenty of time to go to the *bazaar*, sell the mirror-and-comb sets, and buy his trunk.

Headmaster Sahib was talking now. He was saying goodby and wishing a happy Christmas to all the boys and girls.

"In most of your villages," he was saying, "it depends upon you whether Christmas is honored or not." Then he explained how they might tell the village people the story of the birthday of Jesus, and he suggested that they give some Christmas dramas.

"I'll ask Jalal to do that in Umedpur," thought Shera. "Shanti and I will help. We might give a drama of the birth of Christ."

Headmaster Sahib was going on. "You must do more than tell people about Jesus' birthday. Telling of Jesus will not be of much use unless you yourselves honor him in your lives all this holiday. If you are loyal to Christ and your school, this holiday can mean a great deal to your villages. People will be watching your behavior. If you are lazy, if you tell lies, if you deceive and steal—"

Shera's heart turned over. He couldn't listen to that word! He tried to shut his ears against it, but it sounded in his heart. He squirmed out of his place on the crowded floor and slipped out of the big door. Soon he was in bed.

The next day it all worked out as he had planned. Nobody suspected him. He got permission easily enough to go to the *bazaar*. A pushcart merchant was glad to buy the two mirror-and-comb sets for five annas. A sahib had just been there asking for some. He had seemed so anxious that probably he would pay seven annas for them. Shera took his five annas and the one rupee, fifteen annas he had saved, and started towards the tinsmith's shop.

Instead of running eagerly, however, his steps began to lag. "What is the matter with me?" he thought. A queer lump came in his throat, his ears were ringing. He was trying to push down a thought. But it kept bobbing up, "Steal—steal—thou shalt not steal!"

He was in front of the tinsmith's now. His heart was beating so hard it almost stopped his breath. Suddenly he knew he could not do it. He turned his back on the bright, painted

boxes. Straight back to the school compound he ran as fast as he could.

Soon he was standing in the memsahiba's beautiful room, gazing at the picture of Jesus on the wall. He looked so kind, it gave Shera courage to blurt out his story. The memsahiba looked very grave as Shera put the five annas in her hand. "I think you will have to pay seven annas," she said, "for that is what it cost to buy back the gifts."

Out of his precious hoard came two more annas. The rest he put in the school savings bank. He knew that it would take him more than two months after he returned from vacation to earn enough for his trunk. But oh, what a relief it was to be square again!

There was great excitement in Umedpur after Shera's return. All the Christian young people of the village were keen to be in the Christmas drama that Shera had suggested.

"I haven't any drama of the birth of Christ printed in a book to teach you," explained Jalal when they were all gathered one evening around him in the courtyard of his father's house. The headman was glad to let his son teach the children when the day's work was done. "We shall have to make up our own play of the events of Jesus' birth."

"How can we know these events?" asked Buta.

"By reading in the gospel, of course," said Shera, feeling so glad he could read. Indeed he was a great help to Jalal in reading aloud the beautiful stories. Often and often Shanti and he would say over to their mother the words that

sounded like music, "And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field. . . . And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. . . . Wise Men from the East came. . . . For we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

It was all so new and wonderful to most of the children, they could think of nothing else. As Shanti helped Father make a manger for the cow, bringing him the sun-dried bricks and helping him build them up against the outside wall of the house and then plastering them over with smooth mud, she thought, "In a manger like this lay the sweet Baby Jesus." She hummed softly.

In the manger, in the manger is holy light.
Who is this who comes in the manger?

While Shera carried from the field on the canal bank great loads of fodder for the camel who worked the farmer's well, he thought, "On camels like this rode the Wise Men searching for the new-born King."

They had no trouble planning their costumes and scenery. In fact they needed none. Their own clothes and their own village and houses and animals were so much like those in Bethlehem when Jesus was born that they really could understand the story better than American boys and girls can. It was easy for them to act it out. All the boys and girls and older people loved acting and singing.

Crowds of people came to the Christmas celebration. Many

Christians arrived from the nearby villages. One group of families walked seven miles. The missionary sahib and his family from the Village of Service drove up in their Ford. They all ate together, for an enormous pot of rice and a little meat curry had been prepared. They called this dinner *Prem Bhojan*, which means Feast of Love. There was shouting and playing among the children, and the whole congregation sang psalm after psalm till it was quite dark. Some of the young people who had been to boarding school knew a few Christmas hymns and sang them with joy.

The stars came out. In the cloudless dark blue sky, they shone brilliantly. The sky and stars seemed very near, like a huge, bright ceiling shedding light on their pageant.

The stage was the courtyard of the Christian headman's house. There was the manger by the house wall. Above it was a star made by cutting a star-shaped hole in a piece of cardboard, covering it with orange-colored tissue paper, and placing a little clay lamp behind it on the shelf. One shadowy corner was the field where "shepherds watched their flocks by night." The audience sat on the ground of the courtyard, wrapped in shawls and crowded closely together to keep warm, for nights are cold in December. They sat so close to the stage that they were often mixed up with the actors. No one minded that, however. On the low mud wall enclosing the courtyard sat many non-Christians, watching and listening reverently. The roofs of nearby houses were filled with women and children.

The first scene was a little garden made from three flower-pots of yellow daisies and larkspur which Sukhi had brought home from school. At the back of the stage were sprays of bright yellow mustard flowers. The child who was Mary was kneeling there in a soft blue *sari*. Shanti was the angel who



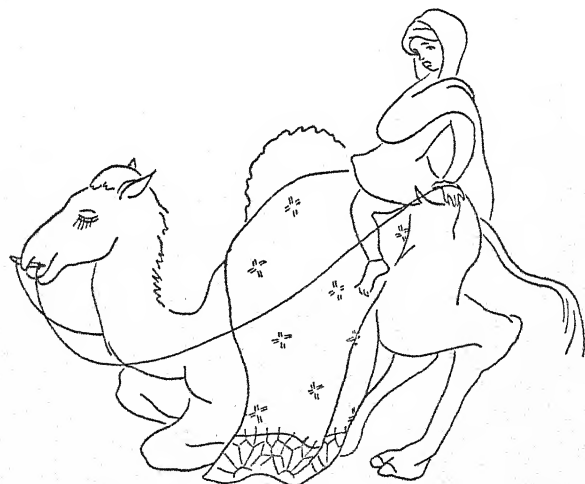
came to tell her that the Baby was to be born. She had her own white *sari*, washed clean that day, and her wings were made from old pieces of newspaper which she had found. They looked quite white and shiny in the starlight. When Mary began to sing, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," all the boys and girls joined in.

Scene followed scene. There was Mary riding on a donkey and Joseph walking by her side, the haughty innkeeper telling

them there was no room, the shepherds and the Wise Men.

Shera was one of the Wise Men. He and two other boys waited far away by one of the wells. The three camels which the farmers had allowed them to use were kneeling by them, and a man was there to help them mount. A boy came running over the ploughed field. "Come! It is time," he called.

They climbed on the backs of the camels. Shera was on the leader. As the beast put up his hind legs, the boy was jerked forward and nearly fell off. Then the front legs came up, and he was flung backward. Shera held on, though his



stomach seemed to turn over as the camel got up. Then began a slow, lurching motion as the camel on which Shera rode swayed back and forth, marching in stately fashion over the

brown furrows. The other camels followed, each tied by his nose-ring to the tail of the one before him.

The three Wise Men managed to keep on their paper crowns in spite of the dipping and swaying. They made a grand sight as they came in a straight, dignified line out of the shadows. Their crowns glittered in the starlight as they made their camels kneel just outside the courtyard wall. Dismounting, they came to the manger and bowed in great, sweeping *salaams*. Kneeling, they drew from under their long, embroidered draperies, their gifts for the Baby King—a shining gold paper box, a little brass lamp filled with incense, and an aluminum *lota*, a drinking vessel that looked like silver. These they placed on the manger.

In the last scene, Shera told the other two Wise Men about the dream God had given him. They decided to depart out of the country "by another way." Straight from the stage the camels strode, stepping right over the heads of the audience. Legs and bodies and babies were moved to make space for their feet and their long draperies got tangled several times. But their progress was determined, and the audience rejoiced that wicked old Herod had been deceived!

Singing "King Jesus Has Come," the people went to their homes. Late into the night, from many a hut in the village, could be heard the new Christmas songs, and many a follower of Christ who had celebrated his birthday for the first time was repeating as he fell asleep, "Today is born unto us a Saviour who is Christ the Lord."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Shera Hears New Voices

SHERA got his broom and started for the school hall to clean it. The other boys who shared the duty with him had not yet come. "I must have a talk with them about cooperating and each doing his share. 'With one hand you cannot clap hands,' " thought Shera, remembering an old Punjabi proverb.

Shera had been in school nearly four years now, and by hard work had reached sixth class. He was considered one of the big boys now.

When he entered the building to sweep out, a surprise awaited him. The principal sahib was there, trying to carry in a big box. Shera sprang to help. Sahib put the box near the window. It was a big case of zinc, about three feet high, with some queer-looking knobs and handles, and on top of it a smaller box. It was very mysterious to the boy.

"What is it, Sahib Sir?" he asked.

Instead of an answer, he got another question.

"Are you studying rural science, Shera? Have you reached the place where you learn about electricity?"

"Yes, sir, we have just started some experiments with batteries and wires."

"Who are the boys in your class keenest on electricity?"

"Jindu and Yakub and Mela Ram, and. . . ."

"That's enough! Please get those boys quickly to help me set up this contraption. It runs by electricity, and I want intelligent boys to help."

Shera was off like the wind and back quickly with three boys as curious as himself.

"This is a radio," explained the sahib, "It has been lent to us for two weeks by the Rural Uplift Department of the government. I think Headmaster Sahib will allow the school to listen every evening from six-thirty to seven-thirty to the Village Program broadcast from Lahore."

He showed them, inside the zinc covering, the radio with its tubes and batteries, and in the top box, the loud speaker. As this radio was designed to be used outdoors in a central place in the village, it was necessary to lock it in a zinc box to protect it from the weather and from prying fingers.

The boys brought bamboos and climbed with them to the flat roof, where they soon had the aerial up. They connected the grounding wires to a piece of pipe they had driven into the earth outside the window. As they worked, the sahib explained everything to them. Even though Shera could understand with his mind, he could not really believe in the wonder.

"Shall we indeed hear real voices from that box, voices of teachers and sahibs whom we cannot see? Oh, how many new things I shall learn!" he thought.

That evening the whole school gathered to listen to the radio. When the first sounds came out of the air to their ears, the boys were breathless with delight. It was music—the banjo-like *sitar*, the drum-like *tabla*, and other musical instruments as well, which these village children had never heard. Then came a high, clear voice trilling a tune that set their feet and hands to beating in the rhythm of the soft hand-clap of the *tabla*. They could hear it all as clearly as if the performer were sitting cross-legged on their school platform, with his graceful drum on his knees.

After that came a man's voice, speaking Punjabi, telling the farmers what to do to get better crops. Then an exciting drama. The actors spoke such beautiful Urdu that it made the boys of the literary society resolve to improve their own dramas!

Shera heard many voices over the radio in the next two weeks. Some told amusing incidents or entertained in song and drama. Some told useful things, and some talked of matters that made Shera think new thoughts. Much that he had learned in school became clearer to him through these mysterious sounds that traveled on air waves. In sixth class the boys made use of what they heard in the Village Uplift Broadcast. Their class project was building a model village. They built ventilators into their model houses, and smokeless kitchens with chimneys, and made proper drains and pits for rubbish. They followed the directions of the enthusiastic voice that told them every night how much better and healthier villages

could be. In play they organized a cooperative society to keep their model villagers out of debt. They put in a dispensary and playgrounds. They built a church and a school for boys and girls. In Bible class, they talked about what a really Christian village would be like.

The best part of the radio program to Shera was the news of all Hindustan. India, you see, is just beginning to be a nation with her own government. So many people seemed to be working earnestly to serve Mother India. He wondered what he could do. He thrilled when a man's voice sang a patriotic song to the Motherland.

Mother, to thee I bow!
Rich with fine streams and fruits are thou!
Cool breezes, cornfields green, are thine,
Mother mine.

With many million ardent throats,
Singing thy praise with swelling notes—

In every home, in every shrine,
The image all adore is thine,
Mother mine.

One night, just before the radio was to be taken away, important news came. "Pilgrims to the *mela* at Kurukshetra are informed that special trains will be run from June first to seventh. The total eclipse of the sun will occur on June fifth at two-thirteen P.M." After a long statement about how to avoid accident and sickness, and what arrangements were be-

ing made by the government to help the people attending this great sun-eclipse fair, the voice went on:

"Many thousands of Boy Scouts will be needed for voluntary service at the fair. Boy Scout troops who will volunteer are asked to inform the Scout Commissioner of their district."



Here was a chance for the Scouts of the Village of Service. It was difficult for the headmaster to find money to send the boys. He told them they would have to manage on the same food allowance they had at school, though many Scouts from other schools would have twice as much or more. "We'll do it!" they promised.

Early in June when the fair began, it was terribly hot. The

temperature was 114 degrees in the shade. The boys marched to the railway junction to get the train. There they saw the water carriers pushing their wheeled carts through the crowd. "Water for Hindus! Water for Mohammedans!" Water was poured from the huge clay jars into the brass and aluminum tumblers people held out. The water carriers drew all the water from the same tap, but still Hindu people would drink only from the Hindu watercart lest they be defiled. The troop from the Village of Service got water from the taps.

On the train they learned much about the *mela*. It was to be held at Kurukshetra where there is a Sacred Tank and a Sacred Grove. When the world was plunged into darkness by the eclipse of the sun, certain ceremonies would be performed near the Sacred Tank. The people would bathe in the water of the Tank as a religious duty. It seemed as if all Northern India were rushing to share in the solemn rites at this holy spot.

"Grandfather," Shera heard a traveler ask respectfully of a gentle old man against whom he was crushed in the standing crowd in the train, "what is to happen on the great day of the festival?" "My son, the *pundit* has told me that on that day, at a certain hour, the great sun-god will be in trouble. The *rakshas*, those evil giants, Rahu and Ketu, will grab him and begin to devour him. For a long time the sun-god will be in bitter struggle with the evil ones."

"*Ai! Ai!*" broke in another earnest voice. "It will be a time of great agony for all. From the moment Rahu and Ketu

grasp hold of the sun-god, all the devout must shout and struggle in prayer that the sun-god may overcome in the end. We shall also give alms to the poor in order that the sun-god may be released. If we fail, the sun-god will lose in the struggle. There will be pitch darkness and the day of doom will come."

The boys found that many believed this. They themselves knew, of course, the true explanation of the total eclipse that was expected. They discovered many others who knew little of the sun-god's coming struggle and cared less. They were going to the *mela* just for fun. Whole families were off for a jolly excursion to a famous place.

When they got off the train, the boys were lined up by their Scoutmaster, packs on their backs, ready to march the three miles to the fair grounds.

On the blistering hot walk they saw many pilgrims. One nearly naked *sadhu* was measuring his length along the hard dusty road. The holy man would lie down, arms stretched forward as far as he could reach; then get up and, placing his feet at the mark his fingers had made, stretch out again. His poor tired body was wet with heavy sweat and caked with the dust of the road.

Shera asked the *sadhu's* young disciple about him.

"He is very holy," answered the *chela*. "He longs and struggles to see God. He has been to every sacred place, measuring his length up rocky mountains, to the very source of holy Mother Ganges, to the hallowed places of the birth of

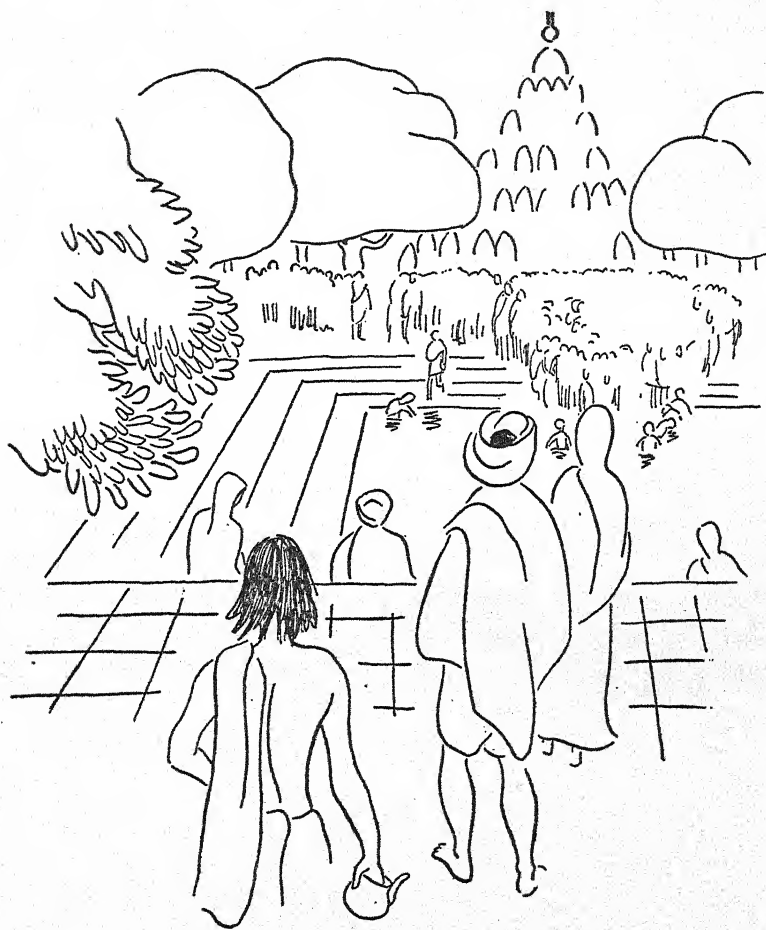
Krishna and the wanderings of Rama. Still God does not appear to him."

"Brother," said Musa, "near the fair grounds you will see a tent where some Christian preachers are telling the way to God. Why don't you try to get your *guru* to go there?"

The area around the Sacred Tank was already crowded with people setting up their camps. It was divided into fourteen sections and Scouts were put in charge. Each troop had different duties within the sections. One troop watched for lost children and women in need of protection. Another held back the crowds as they rushed to bathe in the water of the Sacred Tank and gave first aid to any who were crushed in the scramble. Others watched for sick people, looking especially for signs of cholera and moving patients to the temporary hospital. Still others formed sanitary brigades and kept the different sections clean so that cholera could not spread.

The troops who had this last duty watched to see that the rules of cleanliness were kept, and that the rubbish was thrown into pits which had been dug in convenient places. The Scouts of the Village of Service were assigned to this sanitation duty. They were unhappy about it. All the other troops in their district were high-caste. The Christian boys thought, "Probably they object to this duty and so it was given to us. They'll be calling us sweepers next."

The boys talked it over at night. It would have been so much more noble and interesting to find and comfort little children and restore them to their parents.



THEY BATHED IN THE WATER OF THE SACRED TANK

"I wish I could be on duty at the Tank," said Tulli Ram, who was a good swimmer. "One of the Scouts of F Troop saved an old man from drowning today."

"Well, I think we'd better stop complaining about what we haven't been ordered to do, and get some sleep so that we'll be ready for any hard job that comes along," said Musa cheerfully.

The work was much more trying than they had expected. All day long in the hot sun they ran here and there; helping people set up their camps, showing them where the rubbish dumps were, digging new pits and trenches. They were often weary and even hungry, for they found their food allowance would not buy as much wheat and lentils here as at home, and they scarcely had time to cook their food properly. It was hard not to buy mangoes when so many were eating them all around, but the boys were afraid their money would not hold out if they had any added expense.

The hardest part, though, was trying to persuade the people to keep the place clean. The Scouts tried to be courteous and patient as they explained over and over how easily cholera would spread if the camp was allowed to be dirty. Many people had to be reminded constantly.

"How can we keep the place clean when the people won't do their part?" they complained to their Scoutmaster, who worked harder than any of them.

"Let us call sweepers twice a day to clean up," said Tulli Ram in a lordly way, "so we won't have to nag at people."

"Would that be according to the principles of our school?" the Scoutmaster reminded them. "We believe that all kinds of work are honorable. Everyone ought to do his own cleaning up."

"That doesn't mean that we have to touch other people's leftover food. They will call us untouchables if we do."

"Well, we've been called bad names before, haven't we?" spoke up Shera. "I think we should do as Master Sir says."

Next morning Shera was up at dawn and dressed in his smart clean khaki shirt and shorts with orange scarf and turban. While he was inspecting his part of the camp, he saw a very nice-looking Hindu gentleman throwing his garbage just outside his tent door. He looked like a well-educated *pundit*.

Shera saluted. "*Pundit* sir," he said respectfully, "the pit is not far away and all are asked to throw refuse there."

"Call a sweeper, then," the *pundit* spoke sharply.

"Sir," Shera spoke hesitantly, for he felt uncertain and frightened, "we—we—have decided that we should do this work ourselves, just—just—to show that—you understand—that all work is honorable."

He took a large piece of newspaper from his pocket and, stooping down, carefully gathered up the dirty pile of garbage. He cleaned it up neatly without touching his fingers to it, and carried it to the rubbish heap, kicking dirt over it so that flies would not breed there. Then, with a cheerful grin, he went about his business.

Later that day he got a chance to hear a wonderful radio. The voices spoke from Delhi and Bombay and even London. It was marvelous to hear the bells of London ringing. The greatest event was Mahatma Gandhi's speech broadcast all over India. He was talking on the subject of untouchability. He said, "It is my constant prayer that this blot of untouchability may be removed in its entirety." He advised educated people to do their own sweeping and cleaning up and so "teach by example that sanitary service is not only not a mean occupation, but also a perfectly honorable and useful occupation which everyone should learn and many may follow with great benefit to society."

While the boys were cooking supper, the *pundit* came over and spoke to their Scoutmaster.

"Sir," he said, "one of your boys taught me a lesson this morning. When I saw a smart, clean Christian Scout stooping to do my dirty work, I was ashamed. I believe that we should banish untouchability. Hereafter, to show that I, too, consider all work honorable, I shall clean up my own refuse."

The next day was the climax of the fair. Everyone was tensely awaiting the eclipse. Before noon, enormous numbers of people moved toward the Sacred Tank. All the Scout troops had to leave their other work and help to hold back and control the surging crowds.

Shera and his friends never forgot the strange moment when the light of the dazzling sun began to fail. Slowly but surely a darkness like night fell upon the great, shouting,



wailing multitude. Weird long shadows moved along the ground.

People looked through bits of smoked glass at the sun. Sure enough, it seemed as if a dark bite had been taken out of it. The bitten-out section grew bigger and bigger till only a thin crescent was left of the great, round sun. When peo-

ple were screaming and crying with fright all around, it was really hard not to believe the story of the struggle of the sun-god with the demons. But Shera thought, "We know about the true God who made the world and who is our loving father. How can we be afraid?" He tried to comfort a frightened mother with two small children who wept loudly as the darkness of the total eclipse settled over them.

For a few seconds it was almost like night. Then came a burst of light. The great black shadow began to move away from the sun. The thin crescent of light widened and the round sun began to appear once more. The wailing of the people changed to shouts of rejoicing.

When the fair was over, the boys returned to the Village of Service. There they were welcomed as heroes. The missionary sahib had received a letter from the head official of the Boy Scouts. It commended the troop for working so thoroughly and cheerfully. It mentioned especially that they had not complained about short rations and no spending money. It ended, "That there was no outbreak of cholera in that section is due to the vigilance and self-sacrificing labor of this troop. A Scout named Sher Masih is especially commended for heroic action in performing unpleasant sanitary work."

"Pooh!" said Shera. "That wasn't heroic. You ought to have seen that Hindu Scout who saved two women from drowning."

He noticed that Principal Sahib was smiling at him. "You are well named, Shera," he said. Shera felt very happy.

CHAPTER NINE

The New Light

SHANTI was working arithmetic problems in school. "The roof of the house is eight feet long and six feet wide. If you wished to place clay lamps all around the edge of the roof, three inches apart, how many of these *diwas* would you need? At eight for an anna, how much would they cost?"

When Shanti got the answer, she looked around at the other girls. As usual, she was first. Unlike Shera, she had always been quick at arithmetic. She especially liked these problems out of everyday life.

The girls were sitting in neat rows on the strips of bright-colored matting that made their classroom so cheerful. Their right knees were bent under, as they sat on the floor. Their left knees were raised up to form supports for their big wooden slates. On the floor at their right sides were little clay inkpots, and in their right hands, freshly sharpened reed pens. Shanti had finished writing her example in neat, heavy, black figures on the white wood.

While the others were reckoning—some were even counting on their fingers—she had time to dream a little. How pretty the little lights would look outlining the roofs on

Diwali, the Festival of Lights! She wished Diwali would come in the summer vacation which was near at hand. But she knew it would not be till November. Would her family in the village have lamps on the roof? They were so poor, on account of Father's debt, they probably could not buy even a dozen.

Teacher's voice broke into her thoughts. "If a man borrowed from the moneylender fifty rupees to buy an ox, seventy-five rupees for wedding expenses, and seven rupees, eight annas for new farm tools, how much would he owe? If he paid forty rupees of his debt, how much would be left?"

This was a queer question. Shanti got the answers easily enough, one hundred thirty-two rupees, eight annas, for the first; ninety-two rupees, eight annas, for the second. But it did not seem natural. She knew quite well that debts to the moneylender were not paid so easily as that. When they first moved to Umedpur, her father had borrowed some money for the wood for their door. When Shera went to school Buddu had put this thumbmark to the paper for ten rupees. Then fifty rupees more were borrowed for her wedding, part of which was wasted because she went to school instead. Shanti knew that her father had paid back some. But the debt seemed to be getting larger instead of behaving like the debt in the problem she had just done. There was something called "interest." Well, in three days she would be home for the holidays and could ask Shera.

When Shanti reached home she found that her brother

knew all about it. Not only had he studied about interest in his arithmetic lessons, but also in building and managing the model village with his class he had learned about the ways of moneylenders. They charged big rates of interest, sometimes as high as thirty or forty per cent. Besides they sometimes had ways of cheating poor people so that the debts were never paid.

Shera and Shanti listened anxiously till they heard further talk of their father's debt.

"Today I shall go to the moneylender," said Buddu, "O Mother of Shera, give me the rupees you have hidden."

"May I count them, Father, please?" asked Shanti.

There were fifteen big silver rupees.

"May I go with you to the *bania*?" begged Shera.

On the way to the *bazaar*, Shera asked questions about the debt.

"In the first year," said Buddu, "I borrowed sixteen rupees; in the second year, I took fifty rupees; and in the third year, I paid back forty-three rupees."

"How much is the interest?" asked Shera.

"I agreed to two *paise* on the rupee per month. If I do not pay more of the debt quickly, the moneylender will raise the rate of interest."

Shera worked this out in his head. For every rupee, his father would have to pay six annas interest in the year.

"May we stop, Father, while I put it all down on a piece of paper?"

Sitting on a low mud wall, Shera produced a crumpled bit of paper and the stub of a pencil. He put the account down on paper.

"When you have paid this fifteen rupees, your debt will be only sixty-two rupees," said Shera jubilantly, after some figuring. "Of course my account is not exactly right, because I don't know in which month you borrowed or paid. I can find that in the *bania's* book, if he will let me see it."

"Well, well, don't worry about it!" answered Buddu. "Doubtless the *bania* knows best. He can do all this difficult figuring quite correctly."

The moneylender was seated cross-legged in his shop. He looked very grand in his flowing white shirt and *dhoti*, with his fine cloth cap on his head. He spoke rather crossly to Buddu.

"You have brought only fifteen rupees. That is a mere drop in the bucket of your debt."

He smiled in a sly way as he counted the coins and locked them carefully in his strong money-box. Then he pulled one of the big account books toward him and leafed over the pages until he came to Buddu's account. He made a great show of reading it, pursing up his lips and figuring on a scrap of paper. He dipped his reed pen in his inkpot and began to write in heavy black strokes.

Shera glanced at his father. The look of terrible anxiety and helplessness on his face made the boy feel frightened. Quite a crowd had gathered. One of the men standing near



was a young gentleman whom Shera knew because he sometimes traveled on the same bus. He was a landowner's son who went to Christian College in the big city. The presence of this college student gave Shera courage.

"Here," shouted the *bania* to Buddu, "your troublesome account is finished. Put your thumbmark to it."

Buddu held up his thumb and the *bania's* clerk dipped a pen in ink and smeared it carefully all over the thumb. Buddu

was ready to make his mark on the place where the man's finger pointed, but Shera plucked frantically at his sleeve.

"Please, Father, ask him to let me see the account before you sign it."

Buddu put his hands together and spoke pleadingly.

"Protector of the poor, permit my son to see my account."

"What is this delay?" shouted the *bania*. "This pig of a sweeper is always making me trouble. Why do I lend to him at all?"

He noticed that some in the crowd were looking shrewdly at him as if they suspected something wrong, and the college student was saying quietly, "Let the son see it. It is his right."

Shera studied the page a long time. It was hard to read some of the figures. When he lifted his head he spoke rather timidly, for like many in the crowd he feared the money-lender.

"There is some mistake, Father. At this place where you are to sign, the sum is one hundred eighty rupees, four annas. When we reckoned your debt and interest just now, it came to only sixty-two rupees.

"The boy is crazy," shouted the moneylender, thoroughly angry. "Can a stupid child of a pig understand business?"

He got no sympathy from the crowd. They were eager to catch him in a mistake. The student from Christian College reached out his hand for the book. He soon found that when, at the beginning of the third year, Buddu had paid forty-three rupees, the amount had been added to the debt instead of

subtracted from it. The *bania* was beaten. He could not afford to oppose the son of the landowner. So he laughed and said his stupid clerk had made the mistake. After an hour of reckoning and correcting, he tore up the old page and wrote a new account under the direction of the college student.

"It was a good day for us, O Mother of Shera," said Buddu that night, "when we sent the boy to school. He has saved more than he could have earned grazing cattle these four years. It will be well now if he will teach me also to read and write and figure."

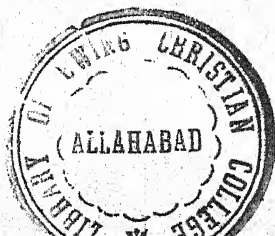
Shera proudly set about the task. Every night he helped his father learn his *Key to Knowledge*. They did not quite finish before Shera and Shanti had to go back to school, but Jalal promised to carry on till Buddu could read by himself. After Shera got back to school at the close of the holidays, he wrote a letter to his father. What excitement there was in Umedpur when the postman delivered that letter and Buddu read his own name on it!

The month slipped by and November came at last. Diwali, the Festival of Lights, was approaching. The boys and girls in the Village of Service were looking forward to celebrating it.

"Headmaster Sahib says we may all go to the town to see the lights. Some of the shops have strings of colored electric lights! Perhaps, too, some money can be spared to buy us a treat of sweets," Musa reported to his family.



SPUN-SUGAR CASTLES WERE SOLD IN THE SHOPS



"May we have sugar castles?" asked little Abu.

"Oh no, they cost a lot. But we can look at them," said Jindu.

The Feast of Lights is a popular Hindu festival. It celebrates the return of the deities, Rama and Sita, from exile, and it is also the festival of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. It is a very happy day for children. There are wonderful structures of spun-sugar, castles with turrets and domes, sold in the shops. Rows and rows of *diwas*, or candles, or electric bulbs, are put along the roofs of buildings. The effect is lovely. Old and young enjoy it. Besides, there are often fireworks in the evening.

The older boys knew that there were wrong things done in connection with this festival. Many men gambled on this holiday "in honor of the goddess of wealth." "Master Sir told us," said Shera, "that educated Hindus are opposed to this gambling, too. He suggested to us that we could enjoy the good things of Diwali by planning a really Christian celebration of the Festival of Lights."

The primary children got ready hundreds of tiny clay lamps. They filled them with oil and placed in each a little rag wick. They climbed to the roofs of the big school building and placed the lamps evenly all around the parapets. Several children were appointed to stay on the roof to light the wicks and to see that they stayed properly under the surface of the oil so that the light would be steady.

The middle classes planned a service of worship for the



evening. They had chosen the theme, "Jesus, the Light of the World." They hunted for Bible passages about light, and suitable hymns. The best writer of the eighth class copied the program with flowing Urdu flourishes, and they made hectographed copies for everyone.

The teacher-training-class students prepared a drama, "The New Light in the Village."

"Shera," said the sahib one day, "how would you like to go home to your village for one evening? I am planning to take the teacher-training-class there to give their drama. I have heard that the Christian headman has started a cooperative bank society to help the Christians get out of debt, and Jalal Masih has been made secretary of it. We are going to celebrate the organization of this society by holding a Christian *jalsa* at Umedpur on the evening of the Feast of Lights. Of course you would miss the school celebration, if you went, but I thought you might like to go home for a visit."

When Shera learned that he could go to his own village, and Tom also, his joy knew no bounds. He did not much mind missing Diwali at school because he had already had the fun of planning for it. Shanti, also, was allowed to go home from her school for this special occasion.

The old, rackety Ford truck was piled full. The boys had named this truck *The Chariot of Village Service*, and had written the name with white paint in huge flowing script on both sides. As they rumbled along with the sahib at the wheel, they sang their favorite songs, shouted and laughed, and practised their parts in the drama.

Soon the truck unloaded its passengers at the village of Umedpur. Shera ran straight to his home. Looking over the mud wall he saw something that delighted him. His mother was sitting on her low stool in the dooryard with the children gathered around her. Shanti was there, too, with the new baby, a wee brother, in her lap. But the wonderful thing was that his mother had a little book open on her knee and was reading a story to the children. How proud Shera felt as he hurried to greet them! He *salaamed* to his mother and grandmother. Soon his father came in from the fields and the family went to the meeting which was held early, so that the schoolboys could get back that night.

Under a large spreading *peepul* tree, a large, smooth area had been swept clean to make a new worshipping place. Matting and a few rugs were laid down. The largest Christian crowd Shanti and Shera had ever seen in their village

gathered there while it was still light. "King Jesus, King Jesus has come," the people sang with joy. Then the pastor told of the *jalsa*, the good time which they were celebrating together.

"Many blessings," he said, "have come to our village since we heard the good news and began to worship the true God. Our boys and girls who have been to boarding school have helped to make our village clean, so that flies and mosquitoes will not bring us disease. They have showed us what to do to get better crops. They have taught some of the older people to read the Bible. Best of all, we now have no debts in the books of the moneylender. We have put all our money together into our own cooperative bank, and those who need to can borrow from this fund. I hope and pray that God will prosper the Christian work in this village, and that in a few years we shall be able to build our own house of worship."

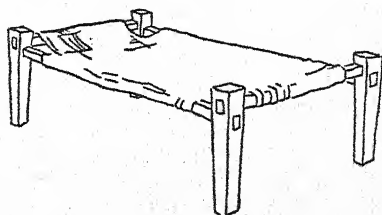
After the pastor's talk, Buddu and his wife and several other men and women read verses from the New Testament and told who had taught them. Then came the drama by the class from the Village of Service. It showed how Christian ways helped a village to be clean and healthy and out of debt. It was very funny in places, too. One of the boys dressed up as an enormous mosquito which everyone persecuted and tried to drive out. One boy was an old man who objected to improvements, saying over and over, "This is not our custom." Another boy was the village clown, always making silly mistakes and interfering.

Just before the last act, some of the older boys slipped out to attend to the lights. They hung pretty lighted paper lanterns on the branches of the *peepul* tree above the stage. As dark came on, little lights began to peep out one by one from the roofs of the Christian homes all around.

It was quite dark all around when the last act began. The actors, representing Knowledge, Cleanliness, Health, Agriculture, came on the stage one by one with lights from which they lighted a large cone of lamps in the center. Following them came the preacher, the doctor, and the teacher, who added more and more lamps till the place was all ablaze with light. Finally all the actors were grouped around the central light, chanting, "The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light."

Sher Masih remembered a time long, long ago when he had been Nikku—Nothing. He remembered his old fear of the dark place.

"I am glad I have seen the Light," he thought, "and helped others to see it."



NOTES

The country. The Punjab (or Panjab) is the large plain of northern India through which run five rivers (*panj* means *five* and *ab* means *river*), tributaries of the Indus.

The weather. The hot weather begins in April or May and continues through October. The temperature ranges between 95 degrees and 118 degrees, staying above 110 degrees for about three months. Rain falls during July and August, but the rest of the year there is little or no rain. From November to April, the weather in the Punjab is quite cold. Although the night temperature only occasionally goes down to the freezing point, people suffer from cold, as fuel is expensive and the only way of keeping warm is by means of the sun's heat.

The crops. In the Punjab, two crops are raised in the course of the year. One is sown in March or April and harvested in November. The other is sown in October or November and harvested in April. The crops have to be watered by irrigation in order to grow.

Kubuddi. This game as played by older boys and men has complicated rules. Just as in baseball, however, there is a version of the game which is simpler. To play it, a field fourteen yards long by eleven yards wide should be marked. Half way down the length, there should be a distinct line not more than six inches broad. This mid-line is to divide the "homes" of the two teams. There should be nine players on a side, but fewer or more may play. Each side alternately should send a raider into the "home" of the other team. He should try to touch one of the opposing teams while repeating the word "*kubuddi*" as many times as possible in one breath. The opponents attempt to hold the raider. If the raider succeeds in touching an opponent and reaches the line or crosses it into his "home" before his breath gives out, he gains a point for his side. If his breath gives out while he is in the enemy's "home," he is caught and is considered "dead." It is a "foul" to attempt to shut a raider's mouth, to touch his throat, to try to hurt a raider, or to catch him by any part of his body other than trunk and limbs.

INDIAN WORDS IN THIS STORY

anna (ahn-nah), a copper coin worth a little more than two cents; one-sixteenth of a rupee.

Arjan Das (er-jun dahs), name of a high-caste boy.

Baleshah (bah-leh-shah), the god of the sweepers.

bania (bun-yah), a moneylender.

bazaar (bah-zar), shopping district.

Brahman (brah-mun), a Hindu of the highest class.

Buta (boo-tah), name of a low-caste boy.

chela (chay-lah), a disciple of a holy man.

chaddar (chud-der), head drapery for women.

diwa (dee-vah), a small clay lamp.

dhoti (dhoh-tee), a loincloth.

doolie (doo-lee), a closely curtained chair on long poles, carried by men.

ghi (ghee), butter that has been boiled and strained.

gram, cereal, like a pea.

guru (guh-roo), religious teacher.

hai (high), an exclamation like *alas*.

Hindu (hin-doo), a native of India who follows the Hindu religion.

jalsa (jul-sah), a celebration.

khaddar (khud-der), cotton homespun cloth.

kos (kohs), about one and one-quarter miles.

kubuddi (ku-buddy), a game.

kurta (koor-tah), a long shirt-like smock.

Kurukshetra (koo-rook-sheh-trah), a town.

Kutti (koo-tee), name of a dog.

lambardar (lum-bur-dar), a village elder.

lota (loh-tah), a drinking vessel with a graceful spout.

Mangal (mun-gul), the father of Buta.

mango (mang-oh), a large juicy fruit.

mela (may-lah), a fair.

Moga (moh-gah), a town in the Punjab.

Mohammedan, a follower of the religion of Mohammed.

Munia (moon-yah), a girl's name.

paisa (pie-sah), *pl.* paise (pie-seh), small copper, one-quarter of an anna, worth about one-half cent.

Parkash (pur-kahsh), name of a high-caste boy.

peepul (pee-pul) a stately tree with white bark, considered holy.

Phulmani (phool-mun-ee), Flower-like, a girl's name.

Prem Bhojan (prehm boy-jun), Feast of Love.

pugri (pug-gri), turban worn by men.

pundit (pun-dit), a learned man.

Punjab (pun-jahb), section of country in northern India.

raksha (ruck-shah), evil giant in an Indian story.

Rajji (raj-jee), Enough, a girl's name.

Rani (rahn-ee), Queen, a girl's nickname.

rupee (roo-pee), a silver coin worth about thirty-five cents.

sadhu (sah-dhoo), a holy man.

sahib (sah-hib), term meaning Mr. or Sir.

salaam (suh-lahm), a form of greeting.

Sain Das (sign dahs), name of the snake charmer.

sari (sah-ree), long drapery worn as a dress by women and girls.

seer (sehr), a measure of weight and volume, a little more than two pounds or one quart.

Sham Singh, Shamu (shahm sing, shahm-oo), name of a high-caste boy.

shisham (shee-shum), a large shade-tree.

Sikh (sick), a native of India who follows the Sikh religion.

sitar (sit-tahr), a stringed instrument like a banjo.

Sudki (sood-kee), name of a village.

Sukhi (soo-khee), Jalal's sister.

Sundri (soon-dree) name of a goat.

tabla (tub-lah), a small panel-shaped drum played with hands.

tamarisk, an evergreen tree.

tumtum (tum-tum), a springless, wheeled cart with bamboo shafts.

Umedpur (oo-maid-poor), Village of Hope.

Urdu (oor-doo), the Indian language used in the school.

